

## Seventy-five years on: 'The Breaking Point'

The TLS of April 9, 1908, carried the following article on Edward Garnett's play *The Breaking Point*:

It is to be hoped that the Stage Society is not going to adopt the absurd policy of producing everything that the Censor has rejected. We are quite willing to grant that there are plays which, while wholly unfit for presentation before a miscellaneous audience and therefore rightly prohibited by the Censor, are quite fit for presentation before a special public in special conditions. Mr. Granville Barker's *Waste* was a case in point; the Censor would have failed in his duty to the general public if he had not rejected it, and the society would have failed in its duty to its special public if it had not produced it. But the fiercest opponents of the Censor will hardly, we imagine, contend that his black mark against a play is in itself a sufficient certificate of merit. Only upon some such principle as this, however, can we account for the production of *The Breaking Point*. Mr. Edward Garnett's play presents the minimum of dramatic conflict; it is a picture of mere helpless, hopeless suffering; and it weighs on the spirits like lead. People go to the theatre for all sorts of odd reasons, but we never yet met anyone who went there in order to be depressed. In *The Breaking Point*

they were all unhappy on the stage and we were all unhappy in the audience. "How sad and bad and mad it was" and not a bit "sweet".

The key-note was struck, as soon as the curtain rose, by Mr. Sherrington, who confided to a friend that he was a "bit down", and looked it. Mrs. Sherrington, who had run away from him some years before and whom he had foolishly neglected to divorce, had turned up again and wanted to be taken back. Mr. Sherrington not only did not love Mrs. Sherrington (an obviously unlovable lady, with a sepulchral voice and a gift of crocodile tears), but did love another lady, Miss Grace Elwood; and, to make matters worse, Miss Elwood was about to become a mother, or feared she was. The question was, what was to be done? Mr. Sherrington proposed to take the girl abroad and live for climate and the affections; but Miss Elwood was unable to tear herself from her widowed father. Then Mr. Sherrington said there was nothing else for it; he would tell the old gentleman, and went off to do so. But the strain had already been too much for Grace; as soon as Sherrington's back was turned her mind gave way, and she threw herself into the river. Ignorant of the catastrophe, Sherrington had forced his way into Dr. Elwood's presence and

told his shameful story... Seduction, suicide, useless remorse, and lifelong misery of the survivors - what a story!

That any reasonable person could have expected the Censor to pass this play for general performance we find it difficult to believe. A young girl and her seducer go anxiously into the question whether she is with child or not. Are you sure? Are you quite sure? What does the doctor say? And so forth. Can any one seriously pretend that such matters are suitable for discussion in a theatre filled with a miscellaneous audience of both sexes and all ages? No doubt it may be said that there is a large body of adult persons whom such discussions do not offend, who will take no harm by them, and who in fact have a taste for them which they are entitled to have gratified. Well, they have their means of gratifying their taste by joining the Stage Society or kindred associations for private performance of unlicensed plays. If at the same time these people have a taste for plays which produce sheer dejection, they will certainly get so. But the strain had already been too much for Grace; as soon as Sherrington's back was turned her mind gave way, and she threw herself into the river. Ignorant of the catastrophe, Sherrington had forced his way into Dr. Elwood's presence and

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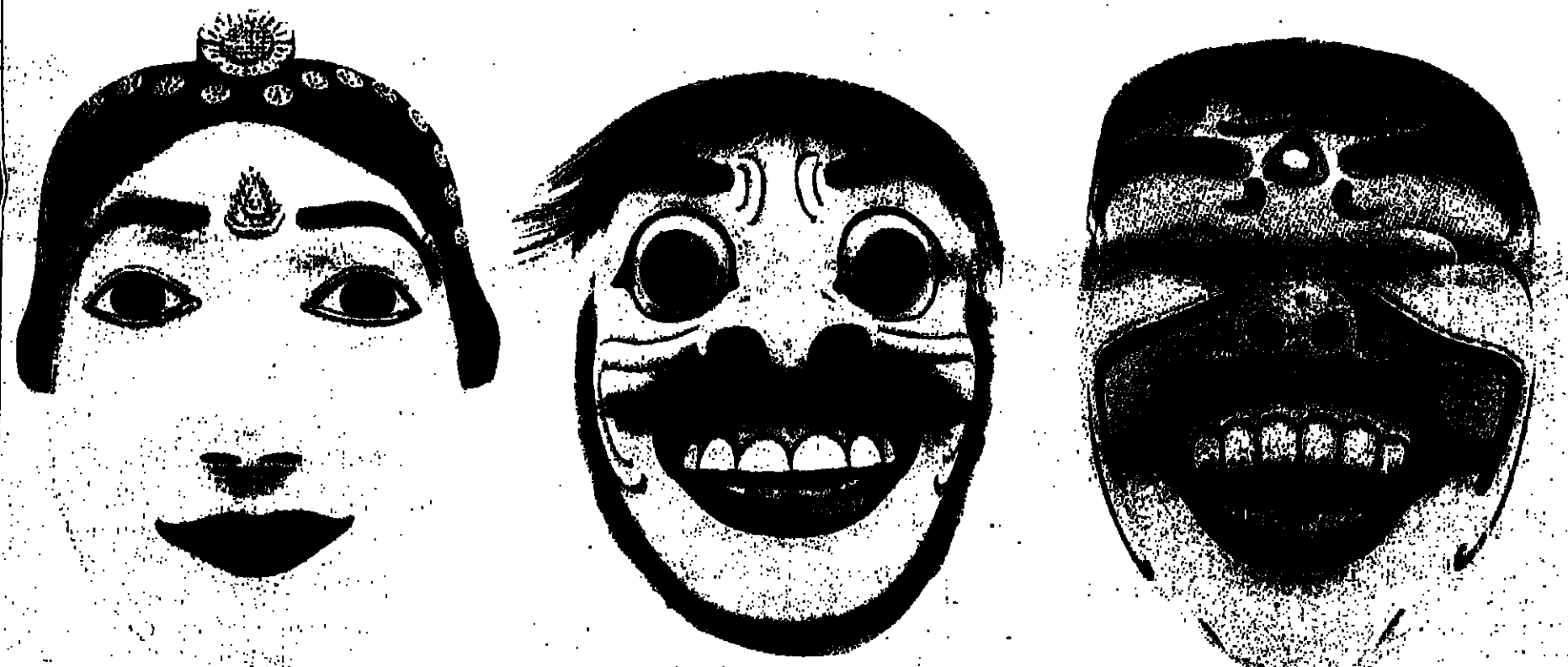
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## MIDDLE EAST

MICHAEL JANSEN  
*The Battle of Beirut*  
120pp. Zed Press. 57 Caledonian Road, London N1. £11.95 (paperback, £4.50). 0 86232 142 5

JACOB TIMMERMAN  
*The Longest War*  
160pp. Chatto and Windus. £7.95 (paperback, Picador/Pan £2.50). 0 7011 3910 2

On June 6, 1982, the Israeli Defence Forces invaded the friendly neighbouring state of Lebanon. Three months later, after a prolonged bombardment by land and air, they completed the occupation of its capital, Beirut. In the course of these operations they killed or wounded, at a conservative estimate, perhaps 30,000 people and rendered a further 200,000 homeless. They themselves lost 368 men killed. In the immediate aftermath of the occupation, Lebanese forces which had been operating in close co-operation with the Israeli Army carried out a deliberate massacre of Palestinian refugees now left defenceless by the withdrawal of the international peacekeeping force: a massacre which, if slight in comparison with other genocidal horrors in our century, will make the name Chatila as abominable in the history of Israel as are those of Drogheda and Amritsar in that of the British Empire, or My Lai in that of the United States. No attempt has been made to seek out or punish the perpetrators of that massacre. The Israeli government achieved its object in so far as it flushed its PLO enemies out of their Lebanese strongholds, scattered them throughout the Middle East, and established a hegemony over the Lebanon which they are unlikely ever to relinquish. But it was not a war on which Israel can look back with pride.

The above bald summary will no doubt strike some readers of the TLS as unfair. Letters will be addressed to the Editor, their rage equalled only by their length, protesting that he should have allowed space to be devoted to expressions of such bigoted anti-Semitism, to so blatant an attempt to justify the Holocaust and to encourage the perpetration of yet another. From the defenders of the Begin administration, alas, literally anything

is to be expected. Had not the Israelis, they will ask, been subjected to intolerable provocation, over one thousand being killed or wounded by terrorist actions over the previous fifteen years? Was the full extent of the PLO menace not revealed when Israeli troops discovered in their camps (according to governmental sources) enough material to equip one million terrorists, with heavy equipment sufficient for five divisions? Could Israel have safely delayed their attack for a moment longer?

The answer is that the Israelis suffered no such casualties, made no such discoveries, and lived under no such imminent threat. All this independent Israeli sources have been very quick to point out. But there were certainly some 12,000 armed Palestinians in the Lebanon, uninvited guests feared and detested by their unwilling hosts, training doggedly if unrealistically for the reconquest of their homeland, intermittently bombarding the settlements of northern Israel with long-range rockets and perpetrating a succession of nasty little atrocities in which women and small children were the principal victims. The Palestinians did not present a "threat" on anything like the scale suggested by Sharon and Begin, but their presence and their activities were sufficient to provoke a general sense of insecurity in the upper Jordan valley, and to add a tinge of excitement to the ski-ing expeditions on Mount Hermon whence the day-trippers from Tel Aviv could look across to the menacing radar masts on the heights beyond the Litani. There was the further assumption, much more questionable, that the pacification of the West Bank would proceed more swiftly if the true centre of gravity of Palestinian opposition, the presence of the forces in the Lebanon, could somehow be eliminated. Hence the curiously inappropriate title the Israeli government chose for their massive operation: "Peace in Galilee".

That the Israelis did face a real security problem on their northern frontiers is ignored by Michael Jansen, whose book *The Battle of Beirut: Why Israel invaded Lebanon* explains the operation in terms of deliberate Israeli expansion to the borders of Eretz Israel, the biblical land of Israel. Beyond this objective Ms Jansen sees an intention to establish a ring of satellite states under acquiescent

governments; a Lebanon ruled by Israeli-armed Phalangists, a disrupted Syria, an intimidated Jordan, a divided Iraq. All these are indeed the avowed objectives of a small group of ideologues whose ideas are taken very seriously by some members of the present government. Ms Jansen admits that her book is not a history of the



Israeli soldier at prayer: reproduced from John Bullock's *Final Conflict: The War in the Lebanon* (238pp. Century, 76 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PA. £9.95. 0 7126 0171 6), to be published on April 21.

She mentions the welcome which Israeli forces received from the Lebanese people only once and then by indirection: stating that the people of West Beirut did not receive the Israelis as liberators, "as had been the case in East Beirut". The siting of Palestinian camps and strongpoints in the middle of the most thickly populated areas she shrugs off as only to be expected. The picture which she paints is totally and one-sidedly black.

Equally black is the now well-known study by Jacobo Timerman. *The Longest War* is also not a history of the campaign. It is a week-by-week account of Timerman's own reaction to it, and of his discovery that Israel, that promised land to which he had escaped after his martyrdom in Argentina, was not just an exalted state of mind but "a country like any other", one capable, like other countries, of aggression, oppression and intimidation, of producing mendacious bureaucrats and militaristic politicians, a country where soldiers were no different, in their cheerful brutality, from the military anywhere else. That the latter were somewhat above the average in their concern for the morality of their actions he does concede by citing such cases as that of the heroic Colonel Eli Geva, who refused to accept responsibility for ordering his men to attack civilians in Beirut and resigned his commission, offering instead to serve in the ranks. True, the government did not penalize the colonel, and the rights and wrongs of his action were freely and universally discussed. But this, writes Mr. Timerman,

does not yet make us rely on the sort of army that the Jewish state should have. Our army should have organised lectures, talks, seminars (sic) and discussions on Colonel Eli Geva's act of courage and sacrifice. If that is the real level of Timerman's expectations, it is hard to think of any country in the world that has ever existed, or is ever likely to exist, where he would feel thoroughly at home.

But the worst revelation for Timerman was that the majority of his fellow-countrymen supported the government and approved of the war; that Israelis in the mass were little different from the Argentinians whose failings he had learned to know so well, Begin, he admits, was "in perfect harmony" with his natural audience; the Israeli voter. The Sephardic

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majority, solid in their support for Begin, remind him of the masses who had supported Peron. "even when the Leader was drowning them in alienation and an economic crisis, creating the conditions for their repression by ensuring military dictatorships. The majority of these classes, always a majority, towards charismatic and seemingly invincible leaders guarantees neither the rationality nor the health of a political situation." He sees Israel, indeed, in danger of becoming exactly the kind of "totalitarian democracy" analysed and denounced by his countryman J. L. Talmon; one in which the rights and protests of the enlightened minority are trampled under foot.

Jansen's work is a melodramatic indictment of a particular Israeli government, and of particular individuals in that government. Timmerman is a tragedy, the story of the betrayal of an ideal by the corruption (as he sees it) of an entire people. But there is a further dimension of tragedy in Timmerman's account, of which he seems unconscious. Week by week he describes the tragedy of the Israeli losses. "All of us", he writes, "are emotionally unsettled every night by television reports announcing the

names of our soldiers killed in action, their personal histories, their ages averaging a little over twenty, and the details of their funerals. But it was precisely in order to minimize such Israeli losses, the political and demographic consequences of which might be so serious, that the IDF relied upon fire-power to achieve their objectives, bombarding Tyre and Sidon for days and West Beirut for weeks; and in this they had the understandable support of the great majority of the Israeli population. "For us", an Israeli soldier told the *Times* correspondent, Robert Fisk, "the death of one Israeli soldier is more important than the death of even several hundred Palestinians."

This must not be seen as evidence of Israeli racism, of what some critics call "Judeo-Nazism". It is, alas, the way in which Western peoples make war and have made it ever since the First World War: using fire-power to save manpower. The massive bombardments, tactical as well as strategic, of the Second World War—Cassino and Caen as well as Hamburg and Dresden; the American tactics of "reconnaissance through fire" in Vietnam; all this was justified in terms of saving the lives of our own forces, of minimizing the need to engage in the

kind of close-quarter fighting in which these were likely to suffer at least as much as the enemy. Tyre, Sidon and Beirut were destroyed precisely in order to spare the sensibilities of Timmerman and his friends; to ensure that the anguish of the nightly television bulletins should be reduced to the smallest possible compass. That is the way in which all industrialized democracies make war. Israel need feel no special guilt in having followed the example set by the Americans and the British.

The Chatila massacre is another matter. Here the speed with which the Israeli media and judiciary intervened, the thoroughness of the investigation and the comprehensiveness of the Kahane Report restored the faith of Israel's supporters in the fundamental attachment to civilized values of the Israeli elite, and of their capacity in the last resort to bring their government to heel. But we cannot forget the attempts of Begin and Sharon first to conceal, then to straggle off what had happened, nor the vicious support they found in the streets when they attempted to do so. Nor can we close our eyes to the horrible logic inherent in the situation: if the Palestinians cannot be reconciled, then they must be eliminated. To refer to the

Holocaust and speak of "blood-guilt" is to distort a situation whose true analogies are far older and far more widespread. The question that arose in so many Western minds was not whether Israel was turning into another Nazi Germany. It was whether she was not turning into just another ferocious little state, like those in the Balkans before 1914 or Eastern Europe between the wars, or in Africa today, whose governments exploit racial and communal tensions to gain populist support and are then driven on by that support to yet more ruthless persecutions. This is the real nightmare that haunts Timmerman, and he is not unique in suffering from it.

The vital conflict in the Middle East is no longer that between Israel and the Palestinians. It is within Israel itself; whether she will allow her fears for her security to drive her into courses which can only result in the multiplication of her enemies, the militarization of her people, and the alienation of her friends. Her predicament resembles not so much that of the Third Reich as that of the Second: a highly cultured community, world leaders in the arts and the sciences, in scholarship and the law, dominating its neighbours by its wealth, industry and commercial expertise, its military institutions

widely revered and copied; but driven, by a lethal combination of pride and insecurity, to seek ever greater expansion abroad and to develop a frenetic, self-destructive nationalism at home.

Those "friends of Israel" in this country and elsewhere who feel it their duty to spring to the defence of her government on every issue and in all circumstances are not doing that racial and communal tensions to gain populist support and are then driven on by that support to yet more ruthless persecutions. This is the real nightmare that haunts Timmerman, and he is not unique in suffering from it.

## Revolution without limits

Malcolm Yapp

JOHN K. COOLEY

Libyan Sandstorm

320pp. Sidgwick and Jackson.  
£12.95.  
0 283 98944 0

The attention of strollers in gracious St James's Square may be distracted by an incongruous flurry of slogans in one corner of the square. "Committees Everywhere", the notices proclaim. Since many of those who pass through this part of London are doomed to spend their lives roaming from one committee to another this announcement may seem to them to be no more than a statement of the unpleasantly obvious. They are mistaken: they are looking at the Libyan People's Bureau and what they see is nothing less than the outward and

visible signs of the Third Universal Doctrine, the revolution of Muammar al-Qaddafi.

Qaddafi's revolution commenced on September 1, 1969. John Cooley's book begins with a description of the reception of the news of the revolution by Qaddafi's parents as they sat at breakfast on that fateful morning, listening to the radio at the entrance to their black goatskin tent in the Sirte desert. "Abu Meniar and Aisha look at one another, instantly dumb. The speaker... is their son, Lieutenant Muammar al-Qaddafi."

Just as instantly readers will recognize that vivid style of living history writing beloved by journalists. Some readers may pause to wonder how the author knows such details and will investigate Cooley's footnote, which refers them to the testimony of several unnamed Libyan émigrés and to a short article. Were the émigrés present at that memorable breakfast? Cooley does not tell us. Nor does he

explain why he rejects the testimony of Abu Meniar himself who told Mirella Bianco (*Kadhafi: Messager du désert*, Paris, 1974) that he was staying with a nephew in Benghazi at the time. The truth of the matter is perfectly unimportant but Cooley's handling of the episode will give his readers cause to hesitate when they encounter unverifiable statements concerning more significant episodes in the career of Qaddafi. As a journalist, Cooley has access to sources which he cannot name and he has used these and other sources in his book to produce an interesting work which has something new to offer but which the wise reader will approach with caution.

Cooley's purpose is to provide, in as lively a manner as possible, information and analysis concerning the development of Qaddafi's revolution together with as much painless background as seems to be required. After a description of the inception of the revolution and the history of Libya he comes to his central contention. "The story of modern Libya is the story of oil", he writes. It was oil which created the conditions which produced revolution and it has been oil wealth which has fuelled the continuing revolution ever since. For a detailed account of the Libyan oil industry students are likely to turn to the recent books by J. A. Allan and Francis C. Widdows, but Cooley provides a useful summary which does justice to the skill of the revolutionary leaders in easing out the oil companies and raising the price of oil. The revolutionaries were aided by special factors, such as the number of independent companies involved in Libyan oil, the premium quality of Libyan crude, and the contemporaneous world realization that oil reserves were finite. But it was the Libyans who combined these factors in a campaign of pressure which changed the face of the world energy situation. The oil revolution also gave Libya financial freedom to undertake her social, economic and political experiments.

During this early period, when Qaddafi and his men were ousting the oil companies, much help was provided from an unexpected source. Cooley produces information which indicates that during the first five or six years of power Qaddafi was protected by the United States, even physically protected by the CIA. He appears to suggest that this was a deliberate policy based on the conviction that Qaddafi was, if nothing else, anti-communist, but this suggestion may give too large a measure of design to US policy.

At the heart of Cooley's book is the question of the nature of the Libyan revolution and of Qaddafi's attempts to extend it. It must be said at once that it is very difficult for a Western scholar to write about the philosophy of Qaddafi and his revolution without sounding patronizing. If Qaddafi had submitted the Green Books as undergraduate essays he would have received them back with deltas and the comment: "Plenty of ideas but all

worthless. Go and read..." His social ideas amount to an inverted Hegelianism dominated by the family, almost like something which has fallen out of Mrs Thatcher's waste-paper basket. His economic ideas are what may be called bourgeois syndicalism—producer co-operatives run by owner occupiers and owner drivers. And his political ideas are that old favourite, direct democracy—an orgy of congresses and committees engaged in eternal discussion.

Are these ideas to be taken seriously? Some have been applied: Libya abounds in owner occupiers and committees. But it is doubtful whether the people really count in decision-making. At the end of the first Green Book there is a chilling statement to the effect that whatever the theory, in practice the strong always rule. It may be that, as has been argued, this is a statement about the evil past, but in Libya it has also turned out to be a statement about the present, for Qaddafi has ruled Libya, whatever his official position. Indeed, some critics have argued that the succession of Revolutionary Council, Arab Socialist Union, Basic Congresses and Revolutionary Committees has been no more than a way in which he has eliminated his rivals and consolidated his own power on the basis of a militarized Libya.

What is the source of Qaddafi's ideas? He would answer, simply, the Qur'an, and this statement has led some to see him as an Islamic revivalist. In fact Qaddafi is not a revivalist but a modernist, and the distinction is important. The revivalist wishes to make the modern state fit the Sharia, the religious law; the Islamic modernist wishes to make the Sharia fit the modern state. Qaddafi's interpretation of the Qur'an is all his own and he is at odds with both the traditional *ulama* and the revivalist Muslim Brotherhood. He cannot accept the limits of Islam, or rather he recognizes no limits to Islam: Islam is a universal system; the Third Universal Doctrine is based on Islam; Qaddafi's message and his revolution are for the whole world.

Placed as he is, in the eye of eternity, it is small wonder that Qaddafi has little time for Libya, which is no more than the place where the revolution began. Hence he has made continuous attempts to join Libya with another state or states: Tunis, Egypt, the Sudan, Syria; to promote Arab unity, to revolutionize Africa; and to globalize Islam. All these are only intermediate goals on the way to the ultimate world revolution. It is this vast restlessness on the part of Libya's leader that agitates all his neighbours, who are especially concerned by the methods through which Qaddafi is alleged to promote his aims. He is perceived as the patron of international terrorism, the friend of "Carlos", the IRA and the Black Muslims, a latter-day Old Man of the Mountain. Qaddafi's own bold statements give colour to this view, for example his February 1983 call at the

Arab People's Congress for the upsetting of all oppressive governments, by which he meant to indicate all governments but those of Libya, Syria and South Yemen.

Cooley denies that Qaddafi deserves his reputation as the promoter of international terrorism. True, he may have supplied money, arms and training facilities to many revolutionary groups, and "like other world leaders of his time" may not have hesitated to murder his enemies, subsequently blaming the enthusiasm of his followers. But, Cooley argues, an innocent lack of discrimination in his early days, and the desire of the world media to find a villain, have unduly blackened Qaddafi's reputation. Cooley suggests that Qaddafi is not much worse than anyone else, and throughout the book contrives to give the impression that he is a man whose works are more moral and rational than his rhetoric, and that even his rhetoric is reported very selectively by the world's press.

How should we understand Colonel Qaddafi? He has been compared *ad hoc* to Cromwell, Harun al-Rashid, Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin, St-John Perse, and to various other figures. His own model rulers are said to be Umar I, Saladin and Nasser. Some writers have insisted that he is essentially a product of the desert. Born in 1942, he spent the first ten years of his life in a tent in the Sirte desert and loves to return there to walk and think.

Other writers have drawn attention to the influence of his schooling and to his exposure to the attractions of Nasserism and Arab nationalism. A story from his secondary school days at Masrata does contain an authentic echo of the man. Rebuked by an English school inspector for promoting a classmate, Qaddafi informed the inspector that he had no place in the class as he was "an agent of imperialism". Such sublime irrelevance did not come out of a tent; Qaddafi is a combination of a Muslim, nomad childhood, half understood Western ideas, and the leadership of a *reniter* state. The same could almost be said of the leaders of several Gulf states, whose policies have been so very different. He cannot be explained by reference to his circumstances alone.

*PLO in Lebanon: Selected Documents* (316pp. Weldenfeld and Nicolson. £10. 0 297 78259 2), edited by Raphael Israeli, introduces, reproduces, translates and annotates documents that have been "carefully selected" from the "vast archives" of the PLO. These "archives" reveal the ramified network of PLO ties with the Communists, Arab Islamic and Third Worlds and the multifaceted activities of the organization in the political, ideological, military, administrative and diplomatic domains and throw light on the intentions, commitments and personal make-up of the Palestinian leadership.

JOHN GROSS (Editor)

The Oxford Book of Aphorisms

336pp. Oxford University Press.

£9.50.

0 19 214111 2

Aphorisms, beginning historically as definitions, are themselves not too easy to define. They belong to a distinct enough genus, expressions of succinct wisdom, of explanatory comment derived from and applicable to experience. It is true, yet not quite enough, to say that the aphorism is a grown-up proverb. The difference is considerable. In the family there are adages, maxims, mottoes, images, metaphors, symbols, epigrams and longer poems, even parables, such as the tales of the Hodge in the Muslim world. Since the French, from the 1600s, have been the supreme aphorists, there is some point in turning up "aphorism" in *Le Grand Robert*, major dictionary, not only of words in French, but of their analogical associates as well. Among these associates—associates rather than exact synonyms—of the aphorism, *Le Grand Robert* lists "adage", "apophthegme", "brocade" ("maxime juridique, vulgarisée sous une forme populaire", from Burchard, eleventh-century Bishop of Worms), "formule", "maxime", "pensée", "précepte", "proverbe", "réflexion", "sentence", and refers one to the *suiva*, "précepte succinct condensé en un style lapidaire".

Certainly proverbs are the direct ancestor and the closest relation. Every proverb, however condensed or nibbed down to concision, had once, like every folk-song, an author: it was not remains a *haku* of the mind without any exact form save brevity and memorability. The grand difference is that the proverb tends to a larger degree of the poetic—allowing that the poetic essentially contains the real—whereas the aphorism, the item of self-conscious individual wisdom, is each known individual's succinct item of philosophy, always, or mostly, less popular than the proverb, as well as less poetic—i.e. poetic at all—and attuned to a more restricted intellectualization. John Gross quotes an apt remark from Elias Canetti, that "The great writer of aphorisms read as if they had all known each other well."

If the aphorism has no exact form and few inextinguishable rules, we still recognize it as literature. How much does it, or should it, exist on its own—should it be an apophthegm which its maker has devised as such, being himself a conscious aphorist? Faced with Gross's *Oxford Book of Aphorisms*, that seems a first question to ask and to dispose of. Is it fair to say that the aphorism is a remark, say from the run of a book or from some writer's collected letters, and exclaim: here is an aphorism? I happen just to have come across a letter of 1888 in which Chekhov has occasion to say to A. N. Plecheyev, the editor of *Sovremy Vremnik*, that "Lying—it is the same as alcoholism. Liar lie even on their deathbeds." Would it have been in hand transferred to his *Oxford Book*—not that he has done so—as an aphorism?

My answer would be yes, and no, or rather a reluctant yes. Are there effective aphorisms enough, which said writers have designed as aphorisms, to fill a large aphoristic anthology? Should an aphorism, like each of the *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld, be worked over until the expression is as perfect and pointed as the writer can make it? Again: I would say, yes, ideally; and then I turn to an earlier, and rather different, anthology, *The Faber Book of Aphorisms*, edited by W. H. Auden and Louis Kronenberger. It is still in print, after all but twenty years, in paperback, to show how these two editors took their aphorisms seriously, the considered and the unconsidered (if unconsidered is quite the word); *carrière calamo*.

Auden and Kronenberger cheat when they wait to sample as their choice may be from such conspicuous aphorists as Hallifax, La Bruyère, Pascal, Chamfort, Johnson, Blake, Butler, Emerson, Voltaire, they pick delightfully from poems, letters, essays, proverbs—Scottish proverb: The devil's boots don't creek. Swiss proverb: Marriage is a covered dish. Icelandic proverb: Every man likes the smell of his own farts. Certainly a collection of aphorisms assembled by a confident major poet of Auden's kind is likely to indulge in latitude. Such an editor as well will have a taste for the lapidary, the complete, the full stop—"there you have it"—"that you cannot argue with—or so we think"—"that is enough".

So—unfair as it may seem at least to those who fail to insist or to remember that attempting wisdom isn't a trivial business—the *Faber Book of 1964* may usefully help us to measure this *Oxford Book of 1983*, just as we could measure the *Faber Book* to some extent by comparing it—another backward jump of some twenty years—with Logan Pearsall Smith's *Treasury of English Aphorisms* of 1943.

The two books, each of some 400 pages, are divided by topics, the *Faber Book* into sixteen topics, with a number of subdivisions, the *Oxford Book* into fifty-eight topics. Contributions to these *Faber Book* numbers 151, to the *Oxford Book* 226—figures which say a little about condensation and receptivity, but will mean more if we list contributors to the one book who don't contribute to the other. In the *Oxford Book*, aphorisms or more and less aphoristical statements are of course taken from the major aphorists of Europe and America. Among contributors to the *Oxford Book* are the following as well: Maurice Baring, Betjeman, Elizabeth Bowen, Ernest Bramah, Churchill, Emily Dickinson, Gavin Ewart, Philip Guedalla, Hugh Kingsmill, Norman Mailer, George Orwell, Ouida, Flinor, Peter Porter, Paul Potts, Ezra Pound, Christopher Ricks, Dylan Thomas, Evelyn Waugh, Rebecca West. None of these—deduct from this what you may (including the matter of wisdom expressed and enforced by style)—are drawn upon for the *Faber* collection. Contrariwise these authors—to name a few—appear in the Auden-Kronenberger, but not in the Gross: St Augustine, St Teresa, Dante, Brecht, Marlin Buber, "Burchhardt", Degas, Sickert, Cézanne, Constable, Herzen, Marx, Mozart, Vico, Simone Weil, Karl Barth, Havelock Ellis.

Misleading as lists of ins and outs are in judging anthologies, these sample lists are suggestive, at least, of different attitudes, as well as different personal and temporal tastes, and estimations.

Judging by numbers, both books nearly agree about the relative importance of their major aphorists. They each of them take most from Johnson and Nietzsche, the question being partly but not altogether what they take beyond the obvious. The *Faber Book* surprises the English reader by—for example—selecting a number of aphorisms—and telling ones—from writers he may be unfamiliar with, even by name. Such are the Paris Romanist nihilist and moralist E. M. Cioran and—a favourite, contributing more than two dozen modern entries—the Mauritanian aphorist Malcolm de Chazal (*Pensées*, 1940-1944, etc.) whose works are published in small

editions in the Mauritanian capital Port Louis (neither of these is mentioned, for instance, in the *Oxford Companion to French Literature*). The *Oxford Book*, often shrewdly chosen, will certainly surprise many readers by including so much that is inferior, so much that is little more than wisecrack or smart journalism, or little more than cheaply and slickly expressed or both.

D. H. Lawrence, for example supplies the *Faber Book* with a single aphorism (and rather a good one—"The map appears to us more real than the land"). Lawrence supplies the *Oxford Book* with fourteen aphorisms which beyond contradiction may be described as weak and unconvincing in the necessary sense of the universal, and all as poorly expressed.

Poor expression emasculates, if it does not kill, what might seem true and surprising, were it only well expressed. It is this aphoristic fact which often and astonishingly escapes so clever a literary journalist as Gross, often apparently in a desire, in itself not unreasonable, to update his anthology and represent wisdom of living or lately living authors we all know about.

A shocking case is that of George Orwell. Seldom has a wise, clear-sighted author, or life-and-society commentator, been less of a stylist. Seldom can style—in it still a good word, still valid—have been less evident than in the fourteen remarks by him which Gross has exalted as aphorisms. Seldom have brief sentences by a famous author been compounded of more drooping English—"One defeats the fanatic precisely by not being a fanatic oneself, but on the contrary by using one's intelligence"—as if a true aphorist dealt in such verbal colloquialisms as "precisely", and "but on the contrary", or needed to use italics for emphasis. Or again how flat as old asphalt, and as dull, is this from Orwell: "The books one reads in childhood, and perhaps there should be no *perhaps*—in an aphorism—"most of all the bad and good bad books, create in one's mind a sort of false map of the world, a series of fabulous countries into which one can retreat at odd moments throughout the rest of life, and which in some cases can even survive a visit to the real countries which they are supposed to represent." How is an aphorism to be detected when a writer (Professor Christopher Ricks) does no more than take a common French phrase and turn it about to read "qui s'accuse s'excuse"? Is "Read at whim! Read at whim!" (Randall Jarrell) more than a not very remarkable if commendable instruction? Are we likely to be much exalted or amused by this improving inquiry from the diction of Evelyn Waugh, "Where are you dying to night? Why has Gross been so afraid of overlapping and of including the essential the inescapable, even if familiar? Why must aphorisms be so respectable?"

In a section to which Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargues, Nietzsche, Johnson of course, Hazlitt, Amiel and Yeats also contribute, ought we really to expect a wise-cracking confessional trifle by Dylan Thomas: "Somebody's boring me... I think it is me?"

"Come away with Betjeman to pull him along through Wulfstan until dinner time"—C. S. Lewis's Diary (1927)

Come away, Betjeman! Pull for the shore! Pull on through Wulfstan and anglo that sex! This is the time that satirists us more Than vernal Vaughan Williams or beautiful Baz! We can be happy, so happy, we twin, With ille-lord and sex and intransigent thine!

Come away, Betjeman! Mince down the High, Think not of Wyman or sorbets or sex! Drink not the wine, of the neather's young thigh! All the enchantment can only perplex! Plain living, high thinking—of such there's a dearth, We'll raise it and praise it on our Middle Earth!

Auden and Kronenberger cheat when they wait to sample as their choice may be from such conspicuous aphorists as Hallifax, La Bruyère, Pascal, Chamfort, Johnson, Blake,

## A taste for the lapidary

Geoffrey Grigson

Bobbing in and out of this to be sure entertaining selection, which appears all the same more of a rake-in *ad hoc* than a deeply felt personal adventure, how at times the student of this *Oxford Book* does need a hearty return, say to the fierceness and openness of Blake, to "Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by incapacity", or to his

When a man has married a wife he finds out Her knees and elbows are only glued together or to the good-natured sharpness of Sydney Smith (of whom, alas, we are seldom given enough). And—another concern—how is it that so many whose sayings endure so trenchantly and so excellently fit the living purpose of this anthology, are overlooked or underlooked? Not a word from Wyndham Lewis—why? Not an aphoristic word from *The Art of Being Ruled* or *Time and Western Man*? Only a single piece—and neither the sharpest nor the whitest nor the most rewarding—from Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*? And to place alongside Valéry and all the other aphoristic masters of France, only a very few scraps from that steel file of cultural conviction, the letters of Gustave Flaubert? Etcetera.

But this does seem to be a time in which a Flaubert might not be recognized or welcomed, and in which our Flauberts cease to be a force, and are packed off to a corner of that fun-park of our TV era which is now so half-heartedly labelled art or literature, and which is equipped with tea-rooms and roundabouts for the kiddies, and some lions and penguins for them and their parents to gawp at. There are aphorisms pointing to such of us as come to feelings of that kind; but we must obstinately declare that these feelings can harden at last to justified conviction.

Does this temporal factor explain so many lax admissions to this book, and so often an inferior choice from the celebrated and superior? Is it in line? By tradition if we say "aphorism", we expect an aphorist: if we say "aphorist", we should expect the uncommon writer so well able to set down the best of his incidental, occasional, self-contained thoughts in the shape, each time, that makes them most effective, whether the writer is Pascal or Proust, Hallifax or Lichtenberg, Santayana or Chesterton, a Gore Vidal or a de Chazal. A trouble here is not so much the overlooking of aphorists as the too frequent presentation of the commonplace as if it were enlightening. It is that, most of all, which legitimizes or insists on a negative review of this book.

"Aphorisms are essentially an aristocratic genre of writing", Auden and Kronenberger were able to declare twenty years ago. That essence is overlooked. So, too, is their rider that "the aphorist who adopts a folksy style with 'democratic' diction is a cowardly and insufferable hypocrite".

On the second page of this rather too "democratic" Oxford offering, comes an apt, if obvious, instruction from the eighteenth-century Prince de Ligne, that "the only way to read a book of aphorisms without being bored is to open it at random and, having found something that interests you, close the book and meditate."

Of course. But then sadly applicable to this book, which in many ways so fits our English 1980s, is the preceding admonition (though hardly an aphorism) by an author we do not as a rule count as exactly elevating. Aphorisms should be literature, let us declare again, and "Remarks"—this particular remark coming from Gertrude Stein—"are not literature."

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# A clerisy of cliolaters

Roy Foster

JOHN KENYON

The History Men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance

322pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £16.50. 0 297 78816

"Teach to look behind historians", wrote Lord Acton on one of those agonized index-cards which performed the service of a confessional for his intellect, and ended up in the Cambridge University Library for the puzzlement of posterity. "Especially famous historians," it is surprising that John Kenyon finds this "gnomic": it is simply a statement of the impossibility of value-free historical writing, a reflection echoed by Lecky, E. H. Carr, and any other thoughtful practitioner of the craft. Nor would Kenyon disagree, since this approach is central to his own stimulating and opinionated book.

Surveys of historiography run many dangers. There is that of Whiggery, in the Butterfield sense: assuming an inevitable and self-fulfilling progression towards the light of pure knowledge. There is the risk of becoming a breathlessly galloping catalogue. And there is the difficulty of deciding how much knowledge to assume on the part of the reader, and how far to discuss the validity and durability of the works in question, rather than the contemporary importance of their writers. A *Liberal Descent*, John Burrow's recent study of selected Victorian historians, opted for allusiveness and density, and achieved brilliance; Kenyon treads a more pedestrian path, and will appeal to a wider audience. Farly by restricting himself to varieties of history he "knows about", he avoids giving us (to borrow his own phrase about J. R. Green) "an amalgam of other people's points of view; within a broad Whig framework". And though much of the material and some of the judgments are predictable, there is a healthy and quirky strain of prejudice throughout, culminating in assertions likely to be disagreed with by nearly everybody.

The theme chosen is the rise of professionalization, largely reflected through the careers of individual historians, with a coda at the end surveying some controversial subjects and their varying interpretations by successive historians. (An approach shared by Arthur Marwick's underrated *The Nature of History*.) Thus the themes of seventeenth-century history at the beginning recur, historiographically speaking, at the end. The opening section is, as one might expect, notable for a shrewd and vigorous treatment of Clarendon and Burnet, placed firmly in context and evaluated with discrimination; comparisons with the "history-writing" of twentieth-century politicians like Lloyd George are not amiss. In the tricky area of the Enlightenment historians and their influence, there is more to glibly about. Again, the material of Hume's *History* is analysed with authority; but the influence of truncated versions like *The Student's Hume* needs more exploration, and the whole question of how far the effects of this disingenuous masterpiece stretched. (As a subaltern in India Winston Churchill educated himself by reading Hume on hot afternoons; that curious combination of the exotic and the abrasive was to mark his intellectual development for the rest of his life.) Nor is the French-Scottish link sufficiently explored; Montesquieu's influence is discussed but not Voltaire's, while the remarkable Adam Ferguson deserves more than a reference.

The generalizing, synthesizing habit of mind was soon to be considered the mark of amateurishness rather than erudition; still, however, "history" as J. R. Green put it, was "part of that general mass of things which every gentleman should know". But the eighteenth-century historian's conception of his role was more specific than that. Here Gibbon can be placed nearer the mainstream of development than usual; but Kenyon sees him, as do most, in the role of unique artist. Again, his powerful influence on later generations is worth expansion. The

High Victorian attitude to him was a mixture of fascination and repugnance; but their children, especially those who dwelt in Bloomsbury, adopted him with delight. His celebratory views on Christianity had much to do with both attitudes (as did his amused and arch retelling of sexual peccadilloes); it is a pity that such continuities are unexplored here.

The first really surprising omission, however, comes at the transitional point to romanticism, when conceptions of both the nature and the function of history-writing altered dramatically. Kenyon takes us straight — more or less — to Macaulay; and the enormous figure of Scott, who did more to create the nineteenth century's sense of "history" than any other writer, appears only in two asides illustrating Macaulay's popularity. The Scott who is missing is not, of course, the author of *Napoleon*, or the collector of Highland folk culture, or even the editor of court journals. He is the broker of a sense of the past to Victorian novel-readers, the romanticizer of the resistance of chieftains (and Saxons), the incontinent rambler who none the less re-created sharp and sparkling actualities and interactions in past time; the spinner of a web which entangled Carlyle, Queen Victoria, John Buchan and Georg Lukács; the creator of the never-never land immortalized on shortbread-tins and denounced by Hugh MacDiarmid. Though Kenyon's sub-title refers to "England", the nineteenth-century English sense of history is so bound up with the world of displacement-activity and vicarious *völkisch*-ness created by Scott's novels that it is impossible to leave him out; recent claims for his descent from the eighteenth-century philosophic historians might aid to the argument for his inclusion. Moreover, the obsession of Continental historians with England (Ranke as well as Thierry) owes as much to *Ivanhoe* and *Quentin Durward* as to the Rolls series or the continuities of the history of Parliament.

It is worth noting, however, that Kenyon has a robust dislike of "trying to recreate the past *in toto*" and "loose talk about getting under people's skin", which necessitates leaving romantic historians rather firmly to one side. Carlyle, in fact, is deliberately and entertainingly trivialized; according to Kenyon he interpreted the French Revolution as "a gigantic and his hallucinatory visions of apocalypse are briskly attributed to the narrative he too took for granted. Kenyon's amazement that Acton thought *Past and Present* the most remarkable piece of historical thinking in the language" will not be shared by those who see it as a key text in the understanding of Victorian culture. But Kenyon's judgment of Carlyle, like his omission of Scott, reflects a firm sense of his own priorities, not always compatible with the intentions implied by his book's title.

With Macaulay, the focus sharpens; but here the difficulty is that Burrow's pyrotechnical interpretation of Macaulay as an ironic Burkean rather than a pushpin Victorian looms inescapably over any subsequent treatment. Kenyon's relationship to Burrow's book is unsure (his preface states that it appeared too late for him to use it, though references to it appear in the text). And though Kenyon, too, presents Macaulay the Augustan rather than the nineteenth-century preacher, there is nothing here as stimulating as Burrow's "great impression", mediating how Englishmen saw their past, and anticipating Proust in producing a book whose consumption was its own conception. Similarly Kenyon repeats Harcourt's view of Macaulay as an insecure trimmer in politics, dreading revolution rather than complacently believing in progress. But his ambivalence did not stop here, and there is more to say about the change in his opinions between the essay on history which appeared in 1828 and the publication of the *History* which so signally contradicted the intentions the essay had set out.

Where *The History Men* is strongest is on the progress towards professionalization; there is an excellent chapter dealing with university developments, the rise of journals, and

the whole shift in attitudes recently prospected by such scholars as Sheldon Rothblatt and Arthur Engel. Figures like A. F. Pollard and Mandell Creighton come into new relief, though once again the non-professionals get a drubbing. There may be more to Buckle than Kenyon allows, if one looks back to the philosophic historians and forward to the *longue durée*; while his influence on the intelligentsia did not disappear overnight, if one takes only the example of George Bernard Shaw. Most remarkably, there is no mention at all of Lecky, whose histories of Ireland and England in the eighteenth century remained standard authorities longer than the work of any other Victorian eminence except Stubbs, and whose *History of European Morals* and

aside in a glancing reference. The ludicrously inflated reputation of Trevelyan is demolished, as much for the "bucolic excess" of his private opinions as for the blinkered and flaccid sentimentality of his history; his *Short History* is referred to as "a contribution to the war effort", and the "Cambridge clique" who beat his drum sharply dismissed.

Trevelyan looms large in the demonology, because the Firth-Oman split of the early twentieth century is resurrected by Kenyon as a Trevelyan-Namier divide fifty years later; and to Kenyon, Namier and Elton are "the two greatest historians of the post-war era". The perennially fascinating Namier is treated sympathetically and at length, though the brilliant and



"Mr. Gearing, Librarian to the Athenaeum, Liverpool", a late eighteenth-century drawing by John Nixon (d 1818) offered for sale in Christie's Great Rooms on March 29.

Rise of Rationalism were extraordinarily forceful, sceptical and frank for their time. On the other hand, it is surprising to find Sir Francis Palgrave accounted one of the "swallows" whom Maitland described as harbingers of true scholarship; his *History of Normandy in England* was roundly described by one reviewer as a "farrago of irrelevant nonsense". The assessment of Proude is even-handed and convincing, and the importance of Green's *Short History* fairly evaluated, though Green is another of Kenyon's personal dislikes. (Mainly on the basis of his letters, he is described as "coy" — which is as anachronistic as calling Maitland "flowery".)

With Stubbs, as with Proude, Kenyon is operating in the shadow of Burrow's devastating panache; but when he deals with the ascendancy of Bury and Firth, and the storm of misinterpretation about Bury's pronouncement that history was "a science", the comparative unfamiliarity of the ground lands added interest and Kenyon's own projected work on Firth provides an extra dimension. It is this period, too, that provides Kenyon with his closing theme, and the compass by which he steers through the minefield of twentieth-century developments and contemporary reputations: the conflict between the "scientific" professionals and the readable synthesizers. Here Kenyon himself advances roughly to the fore, striking invigorating blows left and right to the darlings of the Book Clubs. C. V. Wedgwood is brutally dismissed: "she has gone on her way without a quail, writing readable history for mass consumption without once asking, let alone answering, any question which modern scholarship would think relevant." The Fakenham are condemned to the guillotine *en famille*, which is rather unjust, as Churchill, and the claims made for him as historian (more persistent than might be credited), are shouldered

history which later generations only slowly followed; their *Methods of Social Study* is central to any study of developments in English historiography. Not unconnected with this omission is Kenyon's avoidance of the historiographical developments traceable in the Communist Party Historians' Group between the war, the foundation of *Past and Present* in the early 1950s, and the growth of a sophisticated far beyond the achievement of Postgate and Cole. The fact that this process has a distinctive ideological pedigree cannot be ignored; if *Past and Present* soon dropped its claim to be a journal of "scientific history", *History Workshop* has recently and rather self-righteously proclaimed itself "a journal of socialist and feminist historians". Kenyon's dismissal of Marxism as unimportant, the stream of English historiography not only ignores the powerful influence of Hobsbawm, Hill and Hilton; it also leaves out completely E. P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, arguably the most influential history book of its generation (if only because students bought it as well as read it). Quite possibly, it may — like that other perennial dazzler, George Dyer's *England's Strange Death of Liberalism* — turn out to be a brilliant singleton, more important than the debates it provokes than for its own intrinsic merits. But it jolted historical perceptions in a way that deserves, in a book bearing this title, a mention at least.

Kenyon may steer round such work on the grounds of supposed "unprofessionalism", or the traditional plea of "not my period"; but he similarly ignores Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, the upheaval in the study of intellectual history in the early modern era. If the criterion of inclusion is that of "professionalism" and political preoccupations, it does not explain the absence of the other notable development of the 1960s: the emergence of the high-political behaviourists of Peterhouse. These mandarins draw on a tradition in English historiography which reaches (at least as apostrophized in Maurice Cowling's intellectual autobiography) the heights of esotericism. To ignore both the resurgence of Tory nihilism and the reinstatement of radically "contested" history is to miss a valuable dimension which in many ways links back to Kenyon's earlier preoccupations: the theme, for instance, of how modern England avoided revolution, for which Macaulay, Froude and Halevy all produced characteristic answers, and which still defines a large area of discussion.

Indeed, a history of historiography might address itself profitably to such themes and preoccupations, more than to the "history men" (the ready-made is regrettably themselves). The history of the "history men" is not particularly attractive. The obsessiveness and gossypiness of most pure specimens of the breed are striking — though this is probably a general feature of professionalized life among the upper middle classes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Frederick York Powell vanished to London at weekends, "where he had a wife whom no-one had seen"; Tawney "went frequently to church, often taking his dog, less frequently his wife". Such throwaway remarks, made by contemporaries in the profession, betray the attitudes of a generation. Carlyle's "necromantic witchcraft", probably best anatomized in Angus Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (Namier, ever the outsider, loudly ridiculed the sexless lives of Oxford dons, and between his marriages maintained regular arrangements with respectable London tarts). It is a world ready to take itself with ludicrous seriousness: "an erring colleague" remarked Tawney sadly, "is not an Amalekite, to be smitten hip and thigh", but a righteous historian on the scent of error knows no clemency. Kenyon is a true practitioner in this more gentle with the reputations of the dead than the living; and also in that what he leaves out is not infinitely

# Recognition of a revisionist

Christopher Haigh

G. R. ELTON

Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government: Volume Three. Papers and Reviews 1973-1981

512pp. Cambridge University Press. £27.50. 0 521 24893 0

DELOYD J. GUTH and JOHN W. McKENNA (Editors)

Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G. R. Elton from his American friends

418pp. Cambridge University Press. £27.50. 0 521 24841 8

G. R. Elton's major contribution to historical studies has, in recent weeks, been demonstrated by the third volume of his collected *Studies*, celebrated by his American admirers in a *Fortnightly*, and, at last, recognized by his nomination to the Cambridge Regius chair. In thirty-five years he has written twelve books, edited ten, published ninety articles and contributed 250 reviews. He has been a tireless correspondent, advising and chastising his colleagues in a barrage of witty letters; an indefatigable committee-man, serving conscientiously in Cambridge and London; and an energetic promoter of new publishing projects. He has been a stimulating teacher, a careful supervisor, and a generous guide and host to visitors to Cambridge. There are few who have worked on topics in Tudor and early Stuart history who do not owe him debts; and even many of critics agreed it would have been a disgrace if the Regius chair had been bestowed elsewhere. But though he has inspired students by the dozen and has shared a large and lively seminar for many years, he has fostered and favoured independence and there is no "Elton school" among early-modern historians. Some make paranoid references to "the Eltonians" when an academic post in History is vacant and Elton's candidates appear, but his former pupils do not constitute a party (or even a faction): he has many friends, but not many followers.

In all the clashes over *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (1953) and the related studies, few have been willing to go to the stake, or even to the *English Historical Review*, in defence of the achievements of Thomas Cromwell — Elton, of course, needs no defenders, for his own pen is mighty enough. Except, for some reason, among the Americans, the "Cromwellian revolution" has not found favour with Elton's own students: a group of his former pupils is preparing a set of essays which will argue that change in Tudor government was gradual, accidental, and conditioned by immediate political needs. Even to Elton's admirers, Cromwellian reform was tangential to the central problem of the role of bureaucratic institutions in government. His conception of Tudor politics sometimes seemed anachronistic in its assumption that "government" (Cromwell's "administration") could formulate and enforce a "programme" through centralized institutions upon a separate use of networks of patronage relationships, carried more conviction — and in his three exploratory presidential addresses to the Historical Society (reprinted in *Studies*) Elton himself gave some endorsement to such a view. But if there is no "Elton school" it is primarily because there is no overarching Eltonian interpretation of early-modern England and no unique and innovative method — though careful study of administrative archives may be all too rare, it is not uniquely Eltonian. Recent attempts to deify his elevation to the Regius chair as a political victory of "High Toryism" (whatever his personal convictions, Elton is no Tory ideologue in historical interpretation).

The latest volume of *Studies*, with twenty articles (one, on J. A. Froude, as yet unpublished), two transcripts of taped lectures and ten reviews, from 1973-81, presents varied techniques, topics and attitudes. Elton is as hard-nosed a Tory sceptic as any could wish in his assessments of Thomas More and the Duke of Somerset, or in his doubts on the influence of popular grievances in the Pilgrimage of Grace or "commonwealth" preaching under Edward VI; but in his sensitive (even sentimental) presentation of Thomas Cromwell as an idealistic (but practical) constitutional and social reformer, he seems archaically Whiggish. In articles on Tudor parliaments and reviews on Stuart politics, Elton is aggressively revisionist, but even in his latest considerations of early Tudor reform (and, elsewhere, on the origins and course of the English Reformation) he still appears as an unreconstructed Whig. For there is, happily, no necessary connection between Tory politics and Tory history, or vice versa: many of those offering revisionist "interpretations of pre-Civil War English politics are themselves liberals or social democrats. The apparent inconsistencies in the Elton canon reflect specific responses to the evidence on individual issues, not a pervasive Toryian perversion in challenging inherited views, and developing attitudes and interests.

There is plenty of evidence for development in *Studies*. The embattled, and sometimes embittered, Elton of the 1950s and 1960s, the defender and extender of entrenched positions, has given way to the milder and more modest elder statesman of the profession. His fiercest fire is now reserved for dead historians (A. F. Pollard and J. E. Neale) and failed politicians (More and Somerset); he can now forgive error in others (Froude) and admit it in himself. It is true that his concessions are either small and specific (that Parliament was not asked for supply in 1572), or so general and vague that the extent of the "retraction" is not clear. He grants the administrative sub-division of counties and David Cressy (almost a pupil) on bonds of association. The legal historians produce solid entries, notably Maria Clement on Chancery, W. H. Bryson on Exchequer, T. G. Barnes on Star Chamber and J. S. Cockburn on Egerton's campaign against Serjeant Hele — the last a well-told story.

But when senior historians submit inferior samples of their work, editors really should have the courage to say "No!". Mortimer Levine's survey of women in Tudor government is confined to the obvious quotations on gynaeocracy and eight pages of comment on the role of Henry VIII's first three wives in politics (with no response to Elton's plea for a study of the ladies of the Privy Chamber). Wallace MacCaffrey considers Elizabeth's parliaments in the light of revisions of early Stuart politics, but in doing so disregards revision in his own field: he relies heavily upon Neale, but ignores Graves, Jones and Elton. Elton's views on punishment, and gives cursory comparison with Thomas More and Thomas Smith. Charles Carter reports, from Sarmiento's published correspondence, the ambassador's own exaggerated version of his efforts to influence English policies on papists and pirates. J. H. Hexter, in his self-indulgent *History Primer* style, ponders the problems of quoting from Commons speeches when the parliamentary diarist offers discrepant versions of what was said. But the issue Elton had raised with him, that of the biases of diarists, deserved better treatment than Hexter's flat, dismissive paragraph: perhaps that was the place for Hexter's own little free, leaving the rest of the essay free for Elton's substantive problem. Hexter's essay is odd ("some silly"), but there is in it some echo of the liveliness and aggression of Elton's own work, which is a relief after all the ponderous obsequence to the "Tudor revolution" and "Elton's era". What the volume lacks, of course, is a piece from Elton himself, an inveterate contributor to *Past and Present*. But the collection does stand in forceful testimony to the many debts owed to Elton by friends in North America, and, by implication, and *à fortiori*, by many of us in Britain. And that — and not any political concern — is why his promotion is so welcome.

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# Shamelessly *pro*, outrageously *contra*

J. A. BURROW

JOHN SCATTERGOOD (Editor)

John Skelton: The Complete English Poems

573pp. Penguin. £6.95.

0 14 042 233 1

Reviewing Philip Henderson's *Complete Poems of John Skelton* in 1932, Robert Graves regretted that its appearance had probably delayed "for another ten years or more" the publication of a truly scholarly modern edition. In fact, readers have had to wait for fifty. Robert Kinsman produced a good volume of selections in 1969, in the Clarendon Medieval and Tudor Series; but otherwise the editing of Skelton has remained much where Alexander Dyce left it in 1843 with his two-volume *Poetical Works of John Skelton* - a magnificent pioneering work, but inevitably requiring replacement after more than a century. Recently this glaring omission in English literary scholarship has at last been made good: first by Paula Neuss's edition of Skelton's play *Magnificence*, and now by John Scattergood's edition of his complete English poems (including *Magnificence*, but excluding the purely Latin poems printed by Dyce) in the Penguin English Poets series.

To judge by A. S. G. Edwards's selection of criticism in his *Skelton: The Critical Heritage* (1981), Skelton seems to have taken over from Spenser as the Poet's Poet. All eight of the twentieth-century critical essays printed by Edwards are the work of poets or novelists: Richard Hughes, Edmund Blunden, Humbert Wolfe, Robert Graves, W. H. Auden, G. S. Fraser, E. M. Forster and C. S. Lewis. Such a list of admirers does peculiar credit to a quirky and uneven early Tudor writer, whose work is often exceedingly hard to understand (impossible in Henderson's edition), either because of its references to goings-on in the polite and not-so-polite society of Skelton's day, or else because of its racy English - and also, if such a thing can be imagined, its racy Latin. As Skelton observed of one of his more outrageous centos of Latin verse, "*Industriosum postulat interpretem*". It requires a hard-working interpreter. As E. M. Forster rightly said, in his politely bewildered lecture delivered at the Aldersburgh Festival, Skelton is "extremely strange". Part of his strangeness - not least, one would have thought, for a modern poet - lies in the way his verse continually gravitates towards either the shameless praise or the outrageous abuse of contemporary individuals. His most characteristic modes are eulogy and dyslogy, especially the latter. Can any poet ever have written so many poems with "against" in their title? "Against a Conely Coystroutwe", "Against the Scootes", "Against Garmesche", "Against Dundas", "Against Venemous Tongues", "A Replacation Against Certayne Yong Scolers" - not to speak of the several pieces which he would no doubt have dearly liked to call "Against Wolsey". A book has been written on "Skelton and Satire", but, although Skelton himself does use the term "satire", his other words are nearer the mark: "railing" and "invective". It was not for nothing that Otletius such as Cicero's "*pro Caelio*" and "*contra Verrem*" were universally recognized as models of the rhetorical art up to Skelton's time and beyond. Like advocates at the Roman bar, poets continued to deal in pros and cons. Defence and attack, praise and blame, are the twin poles of their work; and they can switch from one to the other with bewildering speed. One of Skelton's early poems, for instance, "The Ancient Acquaintance", begins in the smooth eulogistic manner of much late medieval verse, praising the lady for her "passing goodly countenance", "goodly port", and so on; but two stanzas later she is being attacked for her adultery with a horseman, in Skelton's wildest railing vein.

With bound and rebound, bounsyngly take up  
Hys jentyl curtyol, and set powght by small neggyl  
Spur up at the hynder gyth with "Gup, morell, gup!"

With, "Jaysy yo, Jenet of Spayne, for your tayll waggyng,"  
Ye cast all your courage upon such courtly haggys!  
"Have in sergeaunt ferrou, myne horse behynde is bare."  
He rydyth well the horse, but he rydyth better the mare.

The strangeness of writing such as this lies not only in the language (horseman's language, in this case) but also in the social world which it implies. Under what possible circumstances, one wonders, could such a poem have been written and even (as it was) printed in the author's lifetime? What kind of lady was the make of Skelton's portrait of her as a mare in season? E. M. Forster no doubt had such things in mind when he observed: "His world is infinitely remote; not only is it coarse and rough, but there is an uncertainty of touch about it which we find hard to discount." Yet the lines from "The Ancient Acquaintance" also show the extraordinary power of poetic utterance (rarely shared by the prose of the period) to arc across the cultural and linguistic gap between Skelton and us. The secret of this power seems to lie most of all in Skelton's command of rhythm and in what Blunden calls his "decisive feeling for accent". After two stanzas of bumbling, mildly aureate rhyme royal ("Of all your fetures favourable to make tru cristelion, / I am insuffeycent to make such enterpryse"), the verse suddenly leaps into life:

With bound and rebound, bounsyngly take up  
Hys jentyl curtyol, and set powght by small neggyl  
Spur up at the hynder gyth with "Gup, morell, gup!"

the original manuscripts and prints. Scattergood is sparing with new conjectural emendations, though he makes some good ones (eg in *Magnificence*, line 579, where the prints' *jurde hayte* is emended to *jeu dehayte* and compared to French *jeu dehayte*, "joyous game"). Occasionally his cautious approach leads him to reject a necessary correction (eg Dyce's *agryse* for *aryse* in *Bowge of Courte*, line 425); but in general this text deserves to be accepted as the standard late-twentieth-century Skelton. (No doubt the mystifying repetition of line 412 of "Phylipp Sparowe", and a few minor misprints, will be corrected in a later printing.) The glossary which accompanies it represents the first serious attempt to gloss the complete works, for Dyce does not do so. It is inevitably selective, omitting some words and phrases, such as "nall" and "Rode of Rest", which will puzzle most readers; and it suffers, through no fault of the editor's, from the general weakness of lexicographical work on English of the Tudor period; but it provides an essential aid which the reader of Skelton has so far been forced to do without.

*Industriosum postulat interpretem*. No one with any experience of such matters will envy the editor of Skelton his task of providing explanatory notes to a poet who found so many occasions for deliberate obscurity. Not only does Skelton delight in the jargons of specialists such as farriers, innkeepers and schoolmen, but he indulges frequently in local references and jokes which even his contemporaries must often have found difficult to catch. His Norfolk parish of Diss, the Howards' castle at Sheriff Hutton in Yorkshire and the

King's court at Westminster all furnished him with allusions many of which must have been immediately intelligible only to the insider. Furthermore, refrains of popular English songs, classical Greek and Latin tags, phrases of scholastic and liturgical Latin, and scraps of French, Spanish, Dutch and even Welsh are to be found jumbled together higgledy-piggledy in his work. It is entirely appropriate that the main speaker in his most fascinating and idiosyncratic poem, "Speke Parott", should be a bird notorious for its indiscriminate linguistic appetite:

"Morysche myne owne sheffe," the cotermonper sayth:  
"Fate, fate, fate, ye lryth water-lyng,  
In flattryng fables me fynde but lytyl fayth;  
But moveour terra, let the world wag,  
Let Syr Wrig-wrag wastell with Syr Delarag;  
Everyman after his maner of wyes,  
Pawbe une ariser, so the Welche man sayes."

"Latin me that, my trinity scholar, out of cure sanscreed into eune eryan!", as Joyce remarks in *Finnegans Wake*. In such a stanza the words seem to hang together, in Skelton's own phrase, "like feathers in the wind". Yet the editor cannot treat "Speke Parott" simply as nonsense verse (though some of it is that), because the poem belongs, not to the Victorian nursery, but to the very adult world of Tudor academic and political controversy. It is, among other things, a heavily scrambled attack on Cardinal Wolsey.

Scattergood is able to improve greatly on Dyce's annotations in such difficult places. He is well acquainted with recent work both literary and historical on Skelton and his age; and

## Snarls from the scallywag

P. S. Lewis

JEAN FAVIER

François Villon

540pp. Paris: Payard. 98 fr.

2 213 01194 X

François Villon sang not Siren-like, to tempt; harsh was what he was, and pretty rebarbative too. Some people admire brash vigour and the snarl of an underdog with a chip on his shoulder. But that Villon was a poet too is clear in the "incidental" pieces, some inserted into the two "major" works; he does not need rescuing for these. Villon himself rescued them, and may have taken them around with him as a display-book of his talent in his ill-starred quest for courtly favour. Villon, Jean Favier feels, could not be expected to fit in with the artifices of a princely court, at Angers, or Blois, or Nantes. Favier has a romantic view of his hero. But we might reasonably argue that if the princely patron paid the piper then he had a reasonable right to call the tune, and that if a piper expected to be paid he conformed with the system.

Villon's pretty *minable* life is briefly recountable. Born about 1431, he was boarded out with a chaplain of St. Benoît-le-Bétourné, who taught law in the university of Paris. The adolescent Villon followed the Arts course and eventually, in 1452, became a Master. There, effectively, his academic career was at an end. He was too much one of the boys, and it was little use for him to moan in the early 1460s that

Bien sayé, se j'eusse étudié  
Ou temps de ma jeunesse folle  
Et à bonnes meurs dédié.  
J'eusse maison et couche molle  
Mais quoy! Je huylo l'escolle  
Comme fait le mauvais enfant.

The multiple misdeeds of the *mauvais enfant* need not concern us: none was particularly enviable, and he ended up due, like a number of his colleagues, Villon as much as they, haunted by the gallows. Hanged men haunted responsible for the cover-design of editions of, and works on, him. But that fate eluded Villon, for he disappears from history, trailing

behind him as fulsome a paean of praise for his liberators, the court of Parlement, as ever a courtier (in a different sense) could.

But what else did he leave? Two essays in the same literary form, the mock legacy and the mock will, the *Lais* (the Bequest) in the mid-1450s and the *Testament* in the early 1460s, in which with multiple *entendre*, primarily his enemies are scarified. The multiple *entendre* apparently was calculated to have the infant undergraduate of the mid-fifteenth century rolling in the aisles. Exegesis is all too necessary, and can go to extremes as entrancing as Villon's absurdity apparently is to the exegeses. Nor, apparently, should the vigour of the historian shake these darling buds: autobiographical accuracy is not to be expected. Now, then, does Favier deal with his few facts?

"J'ai longtemps interrogé mes témoins, et j'ai lu Villon. Un jour, j'ai pensé qu'il m'avait beaucoup dit. Sur lui et sur les autres. Sur le vrai et sur le faux, sur vrai et son faux. Bien sûr, c'est un poète. Allais-je recueillir le témoin Villon pour cause de génie?" No one knows his fifteenth-century Paris better than Favier, and his fifteenth-century world, mental and physical. The result is a fabulous vision woven about Villon: fabulous here in the sense of marvellous, because the characters in this Favier's world are real, are certainly "historical". Villon's world becomes alive, if perhaps sometimes in rather a devotional manner. The narrative moves easily; one shares Favier's enthusiasm, and is swept gently, in a slightly episodic fashion, through the life of fifteenth-century Paris: this isn't a difficult book to read, and, as one might expect, it is an attractive one. The myth of Villon gains yet more stature.

The myth of Villon? Here one may ask those infuriating questions: Who read him? And if few people did, is he important? It is not so much now a question of being put off by *genie*, but being dazzled by it. What was the fortune of Villon? He was read in his own lifetime - though we have this on his own testimony, and comparatively few fifteenth-century manuscripts of his works major or minor survive. He burst into print at the end of the century; but no copies of a putative *editio princeps* remain, and only three

of the 1489 edition. But nine other incunabula editions do survive; and the printed texts may have inspired a collectomania, in manuscript, of minor Villon pieces. The sixteenth century saw (as well as the appreciation of a Rabelais) some twenty-five printings, most of them based, between 1533 and 1542, on Clément Marot's edition published by Galliot du Pré in Paris. From 1542 until 1723, no new edition. Taste was too fastidious. Then, in the nineteenth century, following upon the first "scholarly" edition of 1742, Villon is seized upon by the romantics and the academics. Villon romanticized into a Hugoliesque hero *le Viollet-Le-Duc*, Villon sensualized into a Théophile Gautier; Villon the subject of critical editions and exegeses, volumes of commentary twice as thick as that of text; Villon remains in the twentieth century (when there are too many editions and commentaries to be able to count) the cult object of literary scholars and the stary-eyed.

Joan of Arc, as it were, was being burned while Villon was being born; and she was being rehabilitated when he was beginning his "scallywag" career. More is written per year on Joan than on any other single topic of French later medieval history, and with the possible exception of Napoleon I, on any other French historical character. And yet in order to perceive Joan it is arguable one can only read the trial and rehabilitation proceedings. One is tempted to suggest the same treatment for Villon. But if one reads only the text the taste is dry and confusing indeed. As Marot pointed out, in order to understand the *Lais* and the *Testament* "il faudroit avoir esté de son temps à Paris, & avoir congnoissé les lieux, les choses, & les hommes dont il parle: la mémoire desquelz tant plus se passera, tant moins se congnoistrà icelle industrie de ses Jours dictz. Pour ceste cause qu'on voudra faire une oeuvre de langue durée, ne preigne son sujet, sur telles choses basses & particulières."

We need the guidance of a Jean Favier: this is the merit and the fascination of his *François Villon*. But, to return to the beginning, even when one does understand the "choses basses et particulières", is the taste of Villon less rebarbative, if now it perhaps a different way? Why do people like Villon?

## A hero's early life

William Mann

WILLI SCHULH

Richard Strauss: A Chronicle of the Early Years 1864-1898

Translated by Mary Whittall

555pp. Cambridge University Press. £35.

0 521 24104 9

It was in 1936 that Richard Strauss made the acquaintance of the Swiss music critic and musicologist Willi Schulh, though they had been introduced as early as 1919, at the premiere of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in Vienna, when Schulh was still a schoolboy, but already a devotee of the composer. At their second meeting Schulh sought the great man's permission to assemble and edit the complete Strauss-Hofmannsthal this; but the reader may be disappointed to find, for example, no notes (except a record of the trivial variant "plenary" for "plenary") on the opening stanza of the *Garlante* or *Chapelet of Laurell*, with its elaborate planetary and zodiacal references. The difficult words are in the glossary; but there is no way, so far as I can see, by which a non-astromically minded reader can find out what time of year Skelton actually has in mind.

Despite its somewhat patchy annotation, however, this book deserves a very warm welcome. Professor Scattergood has, as the *Quarterly Review* said of Dyce in 1844, "brought to his task those best qualifications of an editor, industry, accuracy, and good sense"; and his edition will finally - after a disgracefully long interval - supersede Dyce's as the standard Complete Skelton.

Since Strauss's death in 1949 this definitive biography has been impatiently awaited. Everyone who has researched the life and works of Richard Strauss, even at the level of programme-note writing, has sometimes come up against a blank wall of non-information, and been obliged privately to conclude, more or less resignedly, that the full details must await Schulh's biography. Our information was not idle: every two years or so he released some handsome *Schulh* fleck: a volume of letters, or an essay, to help us fill in a blank space. The authoritative, problem-solving critical biography hung fire maddeningly until 1976 when the present volume appeared in German, under a slightly different title: *Richard Strauss: Jugend und frühe Meisterjahre. Lebenschronik*. Few English-speakers,

however devoted to Strauss, would admit to such a concept, one supposes, as "early years of mastery", whence the alternative description of the English edition.

Strauss's life, up to his move, with his wife and baby son, to Berlin in 1898, was quite well documented by his first biographer Max von Steinitzer, who claims to have introduced Mr and Mrs Strauss to each other. Schulh has expanded our purview of the period with the *Letters to My Parents*, and others have published their reminiscences. Some of the last were obviously reliable, others more specious: a scrupulous, highly knowledgeable arbiter was needed. Schulh exposes attractive yet untrustworthy information, where necessary, and constantly eases verification with some nugget of information. Pauline de Anna was courted by Strauss for seven years: it was not her parents who disapproved of the match, but Pauline who was convinced that she would marry beneath her, and could never, to her dying day, be dissuaded from the conviction that she had. Her case may interestingly be compared with that of Alice Roberts when marrying Edward Elgar. The couples were acquainted, the husbands quite close friends: Elgar introduced Strauss to the financier, Sir Edgar Speyer, who took care of Strauss's British earnings, but could not prevent them, during the First World War, from being confiscated, because Strauss was an enemy alien. Sir Edgar was accused of signalling to the Hun, while staying at the seaside, just because he was of German extraction. Devotees of Elgar and Strauss need more detailed information about the Speyer family. The present volume mentions one of Strauss's early girl-friends, Lotte Speyer, the dedicatee of a beautiful early song, "Rote Rosen", but does not explore her relationship to the English barker, who was actually her uncle. Other members of the family played significant roles in the stories of both composers, but the descendants of the composer Wilhelm Speyer are less than precisely identified as yet.

Schulh is informative about the early life, a hard one, of the composer's father, Franz Strauss, who entered the musical profession as a guitarist and zither-player before achieving fame as a horn-player. His notoriety as an enemy of Richard Wagner and, accordingly, of Hans von Bülow as conductor of the Bavarian Court Orchestra in which Strauss senior played, is here set against the latter's gratitude when Bülow befriended young Richard, as conductor and composer: he even acceded to Bülow's request to lead the horn section at Bayreuth during the first performances of *Parsifal* in 1882, and took his son with him. Richard Strauss had been brought up as an anti-Wagnerite, but Schulh explains that this was at best half-hearted. Cosima Wagner soon had the young man eating out of her hand, and his connections with Bayreuth became close for a while, with appearances by his wife as well as



Richard Strauss in London, 1903

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himself at the annual Wagner festivals there. Strauss even persuaded his father to meet Cosima in 1891, and Schulh gives a delightful vignette of the two strolling round the garden arm-in-arm, the old enmity forgotten. Eventually Strauss became disenchanted with Cosima's direction of the Wagner festivals, and suspicious of her motives, so that father Strauss could chortle "I told you so", as did Strauss's intendant at Weimar, Hans von Bronsart, who emerges admirably from these pages, a wise and benevolent influence on his brash, super-ambitious second conductor.

The Weimar years of 1889 to 1894 were anyhow of great importance in young Strauss's development: they included his love affair with Bayreuth, which resulted in his performances of *Tristan* in Weimar, with the retouched instrumentation for small theatres that has subsequently been in frequent use. At Weimar he courted and married Pauline de Anna, the haughty battle-axe whose tyranny he truly enjoyed for well over half a century. We learn about her operatic work, as well as about her snobbish ways ("my Richard is so bourgeois", she complained to Cosima Wagner, who replied "Think yourself lucky, girl"). During his Weimar years Strauss was the leading music spirit in town, a local celebrity with whose departure much glamour and excitement went out of the place. There he conducted the world premiere of Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*: "My dear friend, you are a great master, and have given the Germans a work they hardly deserve", he wrote to the composer. From a subsequent letter, after the first performance, we learn that the part of Hänsel was not taken by Pauline de Anna, as generally stated (there is a photograph of her in the first production): she was in bed with 'flu at the time, and the Gretel took her part, because there was no cover Hänsel, but a cover Gretel.

Also at Weimar, Strauss conducted the first of his operas, *Güntram*, with his future wife as the heroine. He had toyed with many subjects before it, including Goethe's *Lila* adapted by Cosima Wagner, so some said, though

the Kundry of Bayreuth later disclaimed responsibility: Schulh sorts out the evidence with characteristic firmness. There was also a *Don Juan* opera, involving incest and matricide, brought on by reading Max Stirner's *The Individual and his Property* at the behest of the poet John Henry Mackay - one of several literary figures whose contact with Strauss is pursued by the author. Stirner seems to have been an influence on the hysterical sexuality of *Salome* and *Elektra*, as well as on the chaste egotism of *Güntram*. All these people and others, such as Ludwig Thuille, Alexander Ritter, Friedrich Röscher, and Mahler also, were known friends and colleagues of Strauss, and Schulh brings all these relationships more clearly into focus. Of major interest is the successful investigation, with new evidence, of Strauss's love-affair with Dora Withan-Weiss, the estranged wife of the cellist Hanns Withan (for whom Dvorak composed his B minor Cello Concerto, though Schulh forgets to mention this).

In late life Strauss drew attention to the extent that the composer as "human being visibly plays a part" in his music. Stale buns, we may reply, thinking of *Ein Heldenleben* and the Domestic Symphony, and perhaps further considering *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Die Eulenpfeigel* and *Don Juan* (are Dora and Pauline, perhaps, the melodious ladies in B major and G major, and if so which is which?) Schulh actually plays down, rightly, the autobiographical element in *Ein Heldenleben*, and the achievement of this first instalment is to contest Strauss's dictum with new insights into his development as man and artist. Of comment about Strauss's music there is a little, and illuminating, but less than we might expect from the leading authority on the composer. Mary Whittall's English translation reads agreeably: very occasionally a word disturbs the reader, and reference to the German edition finds her nodding. The task is well done and the index is fuller, but not the bibliography, though publication of work on Strauss has continued since the German edition was published. We await Schulh's second volume eagerly.

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# Anthologies of promise

Peter Kemp

BILL BUFORD (Editor)

Granta 7: Best of Young British Novelists  
324pp. Penguin/Granta. £3.50.  
0 14 00 6833 3

Dissonance is the keynote of *Granta's* "Best of Young British Novelists", a collection of commissioned pieces by the twenty young writers who are the subject of the Book Marketing Council's current publicity campaign. Attention is a favoured theme: fish out of water flourish in a number of the stories; outsiders are central to most of them. And there is a marked discrepancy, too, between some of the pieces printed here and the reputations they supposedly uphold.

The theme of disorientation is established with the opening extract from Martin Amis's forthcoming novel, *Taking a Hint*, perhaps, from his father's *One for England*. "Money" sets another fat Englishman, lurching aggressively through New York: he's belted, slugged off balance by drink, jealousy, drugs and jet-lag, he's presented as an almost murderously malign misfit. In a coyly explicit piece - "The train was soon slowing down to a rhythmic chant, orchestrating B.J.'s fluttering orgasm. . . . Now, damn it, her knickers were damp" - Ursula Bentley reverses Amis's transatlantic formula and sends an American careering through Europe. Aiming to sound knowledgeably international, her story stays knowingly *Cosmopolitan*.

William Boyd's skeletal contribution, "Extracts from the Journal of Flying Officer J.", pin-points alienation in the crabbed diary-entries of a man; who is clandestinely conventional. Buchi Emecheba takes a more relaxed look, at not fitting in. Amis's disorienting, her memories of her African school days are strewn with instances of uprootedness. Pulled out of traditional bush life and transplanted to the city, her parents' school is staffed with uncomprehending foreigners - maiden missionaries from Britain - and its pupils seem hybrid. "These girls, the modern girls of twentieth-century Africa, still possessed their grandparents' voices", reflects the narrator as he hears them singing imported hymns in indigenous tones. She herself - with tribal markings on her face and individual thinking behind her - like a constant of jarring elements. Her ambition to write is an attempt to harmonize them: dealing with contemporary subjects, she will still remain a "story-teller like our old mothers at home in Ibadan". In Kazuo Ishiguro's piece of childhood reminiscence, on the other hand, art does the opposite of bringing things together here an old fascist painter is ostracized by nervous new democrats.

The most slyly witty treatment of being out of step is Adam Mars-Jones's survey of a gay disco in Virginia at Halloween - when, he notes, "everything is weird, so nothing is weird. Why else would it be the major gay festival?" Bits of bizzarrie are dotted inventively round. A hollowed pumpkin casts an eerie light on things. "Mounted inside it, wedged into the flesh, is a strobe-light which gives off a bone-white flash. . . . The scooped-out skull, with its out-sticking pieces of metal and wire, looks like propaganda against electrock therapy" while the pumpkin's midly psychotropic seeds, chewed by one of the dancers, also throw a garish flicker over reality. In the fancy-dress atmosphere, variance becomes uniform, travesty conventional, and outside, as well, there is institutionalized zany: "of course in Virginia, the statutes of the Alcohol Beverages Commission prohibit the supply of alcohol to homosexuals". Philip Norman has a sardonic story set in the south of America too; in his case, Tennessee. Picking their way across unfamiliar territory, two English television men interview a veteran Blues singer in his dilapidated shack; as he fails to fit their preconceived ideas, friction and heat are generated.

Keeping up the anthology's preoccupation, Shiva Naipaul rather inconsequentially depicts a wealthy woman having her way into a smelly slum - drawn from affluence towards effluence, it is implied, by some primitive instinct. Avoiding being impelled by instinct is the main concern of Clive Sinclair's farcically Kafkaesque protagonist, an ant with an antipathy to mating and then dying as biology dictates. Graham Swift also opts for a non-human subject: the eel is the hero of his extract from a work in progress - an exuberantly informative piece teeming with facts about the creature's twisty habits. As slippery as eels but far less lively are the oddly intertwined bunch in Lisa St Aubin de Teran's "The Five of Us". Entangled with an enigmatic mate - "still the same stranger of our first days" and "very beautiful in a strange passive way" - the heroine, a Jean Rhys-ish figure, drifts around Italy with him and two sibylline side-kicks, robbing banks and pilfering from department stores. Political motives for this are mysteriously alluded to, but about them - as about everything central to her characters - the author remains emphatically non-committal.

The sample from A. N. Wilson's new book snaps everything into place, and rather tetchily. In particular, its account of a solitary boy tormented at school sounds both flat and shrill: a nightmare crescendo of stereotype - an "obscurely ugly" bully, a priestly pederastic headmaster whose wife is "a well-bombed sardine", a diet of "cheesy milk" and "half-cooked sausages", "a fat matron with a wary face". Cruelty is catalogued with a subfusc sourness, starchy phrases and well-pressed sentences emphasizing the savagery of what's inside them. Perhaps in the context of the completed book, things will look more subtle. But, as represented here, the novel seems a marked dropping off from the more substantial achievement of *Wise Virgin* and back to the thin-lipped stridency of some of Wilson's earlier work.

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## How to end it all

Thomas Sutcliffe

T. J. BONDING (Editor)

Firebird 1: Writing Today  
336pp. Penguin. £3.95.  
0 14 00 6206 8

Firebird 2  
284pp. Penguin. £2.95.  
0 14 00 6337 4

The short story has become, almost by convention, a pretentious form. Without the claims properly to substantiate its claims to our prolonged attention it is, as a studied incompleteness to assert that there is more here than meets the eye. James Joyce attacked the neat ending by example in *Dubliners* but had Bloom perform a more ceremonious dispatch in the early pages of *Ulysses*. In the outshout after breakfast Bloom reads a short story called "Matcham's Masterstroke" from an old copy of *Tubbs*. "Life might be so. It did not move or touch him but it was something quick and neat. . . . He read on, seated calm above his own thing. . . . Begin and ends morally. He glanced back through what he had read and while feeling like the pumpkin's midly psychotropic seeds, chewed by one of the dancers, also throw a garish flicker over reality. In the fancy-dress atmosphere, variance becomes uniform, travesty conventional, and outside, as well, there is institutionalized zany: "of course in Virginia, the statutes of the Alcohol Beverages Commission prohibit the supply of alcohol to homosexuals". Philip Norman has a sardonic story set in the south of America too; in his case, Tennessee. Picking their way across unfamiliar territory, two English television men interview a veteran Blues singer in his dilapidated shack; as he fails to fit their preconceived ideas, friction and heat are generated.

Since then the short story as a luminous moment, torn away from the everyday and left with ragged edges, has mostly won out over the quick and the clever. One of the most interesting things about Penning's annual collections of new writing is that they are generous enough to allow both forms to stand side by side. On the evidence of the first two books, the best writers are restoring a bright and sceptical intelligence to the short story. The cherished fragment has always had

its vices: a tendency to preciousness and the requirement of a certain quiescence from the writer. Reading too many can provoke an irritable cynicism because of the air of expectancy that hangs over them, as the author attends mutely, like a child presenting a seal for approval. The hope they all live by is perfectly expressed in the final lines of Adam Mars-Jones's piece "Structural Anthropology" published in *Firebird 1*. "Just below the surface of story, like the succulent separate threads beneath the skin of a perfectly cooked vegetable-spaghetti, lies the tangled richness of myth." But in that story they close a witty elaboration of the dangers of such interpretation. Mars-Jones's pastiche of a structural analysis of an urban folk tale (an adulterous husband has his hand superglued to his penis by the wife) is both convincing and absurd, and as a result sharply judicious about the ease with which something can be made out of nothing. This bravura cleverness is not modest in its dealings with the world, but the frequency with which emptiness is turned up beneath the "surface of story" makes it a delightful relief. Salman Rushdie's beautifully detailed account of one man's collision with Mrs Gandhi's sterilization campaign also has its own point to make about the stories we tell ourselves. Bernard McCleverty's description of a father's death and a dismal act of familial duty comes more directly from the pressed flower school of writing, but the marvellous awkward care with which it is written and the conceit implied in the title, "Life Drawing", preserve it from being artlessly inconclusive.

*Firebird 2* replaces the cocky metropolitan tone with something more deliberately parochial in its approach. It includes stories set in India, Guyana, Egypt, Japan, Ireland and the provinces of England and one result of this broader scope is that the quality is less even than that of the first collection. There are some conventional pleasures. Roy A. K. Heath's description of a Georgetown civil

interviewer is slaughtered by an interviewee with a bread-knife. Largely constructed of glued-together cliché - "unable to conceal my triumph", "filled with insane joy", "I think that was when I realized that I would have to kill him" - this piece, "The Golden Bough", isn't capable of sustaining anything of weight. Feebler still is Ian McEwan's account of the writing of his libretto for *Dr Shall We Die?* For this oratorio, he explains, he sought a style that could "express public themes without pomposity and private feelings without bathos". Sadly, this has eluded him here. Pondering the nuclear arms race, McEwan comes up with insights of unassailable banality: "It was as if each side prepared for war because it saw the other doing the same." If peace is to be established, he declares, a "shift from violence" must occur "within individuals in sufficient numbers". Around these perceptions, he spreads garterings of everything from physics to feminism. Modishly, he decries Newton, and dismisses "Logic, discipline, objectivity, thought unmodulated by emotion" as "patriarchal values". True to his scorn for such restricting qualities, he sometimes attains a style of liberated gibberish: "To bind intellect to our deepest intuition, to dissolve the sterile division between what is 'out there' and what is 'in here', to grasp that the Tao, our science and our art describe the same reality - to be whole - would be to be incapable of devising or dropping a nuclear bomb." For McEwan, salvation can be achieved by coming down on one side of a crude dichotomy: "Shall there be womanly times, or shall we die?"

Womanly times are what Pat Barker presents. Set in a Northern pub as a Ripper-like psychomaniac prowls the streets, her extract shows a group of prostitutes huddled over their drinks in female solidarity. Opening with a dash for the lavatory - "I'll have to go for a pee", said Audrey, hopping from leg to leg" - it's a piece in which, urinary matters are repeatedly thrown into

relief. Sharon has developed cystitis; Kath "had a real run of it. . . . It'd all spread up the tubes"; Maureen has found a man who "pays her. . . . forty quid a week to piss on him", though "He doesn't look like a doctor, though wee". Slashing out at men continually, Barker reduces them to a very bedraggled bunch: besides Maureen's wet client, there's a gang of retardedly sadistic pranksters, a near-impatient punter who's also a hopeless driver, a bruiser, and a murderous maniac.

Maggie Gee similarly alternates violence and mawkishness. In her story, sentimentality is heavily squashed by sensationalism, the noveletish pounded by the Gothic. Proclaiming the need "to crack existing formal modes", she gets no further than fracturing the odd cliché by typographically pulling it apart. More genuinely innovative is Julian Barnes's "Emma Bovary's Eyes". Here, the buoyant bookishness that spilled through *Metroland* and *Before She Met Me* is channelled into what is at most a short story as an exercise in hotbed literary criticism. Affronted by Enid Starkie's claim that Flaubert was sloppy about detail, the way she condescendingly "spears the novelist with chapter and verse", an admirer of the author parries her points, turning them against her and adding some trenchant satiric thrusts. Sharp and hilarious, this amalgam of dramatic monologue and critical riposte opens up a promising new sub-genre. Christopher Priest takes one that's already established - science fiction of the "alternate world of invented myth" type - and puts it to eerie use. "The Miraculous Cairn" is one of his "Dream Archipelago" stories (in fact, it shares its central image, that of a trapped hand, with another in the sequence, "Whores"). In it, fear of exclusion and panic at being involved - repeated topics of Priest - powerfully clench together. In his numinous alternate world, the theme of alienation that haunts this anthology is given a literally gripping twist.

Ishiguro's "A Family Supper", which opens with a similar blend of the personal and blandly informative. "Fugu is a fish caught off the Pacific shores of Japan. The fish has held a special significance for me ever since my mother died through eating one. Like fugu, the story suggests, family life is a nourishment separated from poison only by the care with which it is prepared, and the fatal mistake can be just as hard to detect before the damage is done. "The proof is, as it were, in the eating."

The best of these writers are in fact essayists, adding the techniques of higher journalism and lower academic to their fictional repertoire. They draw their style from a different generation's *Tatler* and *Spectator*, but it is a genuine wit that is deployed, one which asserts that the facts of life are susceptible to the manipulations of intelligence, not merely there to be reverently recorded.

## Criminal proceedings

DOROTHY SIMPSON

Puppet for a Corpse  
215pp. Michael Joseph. £7.95.  
0 7181 22070 0

Arnold Pettifer, a well-known general practitioner living in a Kentish market town, is found dead in his bed after having, apparently, taken an overdose and washed it down with a beaker of vintage port. There could hardly, it seems, be a more obvious case of suicide, but a few odd details set Inspector Tanner, Dorothy Simpson's usual policeman, thinking: and his thoughts lead him down a longer and more complicated path to the final solution. A pleasing background, Tanner's domesticity in general, and a neatly constructed plot, though the idea being it is one we have met before.

MICHAEL GILBERT

The Final Throw  
240pp. Hodder & Stoughton. £7.95.  
0 340 27895 1

Detective Chief Superintendent Morrissey, head of London's Regional Crime Squad, attempts to bring down a financial empire which is linked to organized crime and drug-smuggling. His operatives in the field are David Rhys Morgan, a fast-talking, hard-drinking Welshman who slides rapidly downhill, and Susan Perronet-Combe, elegant and intelligent, who goes just as rapidly uphill. Michael Gilbert tells a story almost better than any novel, a quality which is certainly demonstrated in this latest novel, together with the author's usual high professional finish.

T. J. Blyton

# Metropolitan margins

Frank Tuohy

RUTH PAWHER JHABVALA

In Search of Love and Beauty  
272pp. John Murray. £8.50.  
0 195 4062 3

Ruth Pawher Jhabvala's new novel, her first since the prize-winning *Hent and David*, is set largely in the United States. For a writer who has made Indian-Western relationships her own particular field, there is an element of risk in moving into new territory - in this case, cosmopolitan New York - which the natives themselves have cultivated with great success and perhaps to the point of exhaustion. The foreigner must adopt an individual strategy unavailable to the natives: pure fantasy for a non-visitor like Kafka, humorous disdain for an exile like Nabokov. Mrs Pawher Jhabvala has opted for a sort of selective romanticism - selective, because she admits only a small cast of characters: romantic because she seems to exclude anything likely to interfere with the quest proposed in her title. Clearly, love and beauty can easily be pushed out into the margin where modern metropolitan life is concerned. Only by neglecting most of its impact can the novelist devote her attention to her theme.

A group of refugees arrives in New York some time in the early 1930s. Louise, her much older husband, Bruno, and her friend Regi are all rich: they have "brought their money out" and in the case of Bruno and Louise, their furniture as well. The three of them spent their early years in the German town referred to as D-. This usage may only be a bow to the practice found in Russian fiction; on the other hand it is possible that it suppresses a reference to the tragedy of Dresden: in which case it would provide a first, pale indication of all the evasions of reality apparently embodied in the action of the novel.

Regi introduces Louise to Leo Kellerman, another refugee, described on the first page as "an Adonis! An Apollo!" In reality he is a domineering adventurer who soon becomes Louise's lover. Louise and Bruno have one daughter, Marietta, whose marriage to an alcoholic New Englander has left her with a son Mark, now a successful entrepreneur, and an adopted daughter, Marietta's pursuit of love and beauty involves an elderly Indian musician and several visits to the sub-continent. Mark is preoccupied with the tantrums of his beautiful but unsatisfactory boy-friend, Natasha, who adores Mark, remains on the side-lines, failing to grow up.

With skillfully managed time-shifts, the narrative slides to and fro over a forty-year period, filling in the background to these lives with extensive summaries, and involving a

small number of indigenous Americans on the way. Attention is focused most frequently on Leo. In his early days, he looks shamelessly to Regi and Louise for a meal-ticket. His apotheosis in old age is as head of his successful Academy for Potential Development on the Hudson River. Here he seeks what he calls The Point, "the climax of all his experiences and experiments: his theatre group, his psychological encounter group, his study of Eastern philosophies. . . his years of residence in California, the drugs he tried, and the love affairs with women, with girls, sometimes ('just for fun') with boys, his mental and physical exercises." Leo, it will be seen, is a charlatan of formidable capacities, but his theatrical performances are rather tame, and the rest of his activities are reported in summary fashion. He engages the attention less closely than the two mink-clad old gorgons, Louise the durable grandmother, and her friend Regi, involved in a well-depicted relationship with a helpful young male homosexual.

*Heat and Dust* was a novel with a strong and symmetrical structure at times only thinly concealed by the evocation of physical reality. Other stories and film-scripts have contained dialogue which seemed awkwardly expository. External appearances and the spoken word still come low among this writer's priorities. It is difficult to imagine the chic Marietta using a tired catch-phrase like "You've got to be joking". We are left in ignorance of the language that Louise, Regi and their menfolk use among themselves. Presumably it is German, but this goes unremarked by the younger generation.

In *Search of Love and Beauty* is about evasions of reality and one has to decide how much is the fault of the characters involved, how much belongs to their creator. Physical reality is more or less absent: there is no poison ivy on the mossy banks of Leo's estate where Mark, Natasha and their friends disport themselves. More seriously, concentration on love and beauty has led to neglect of those two equally important abstractions, power and wealth. These people swim in money, as though it were their natural element. As far as power goes, in the form of politics, it is a relief perhaps to have a novel about refugees which mentions neither the Holocaust nor the Second World War - but hardly a justifiable one.

There is a famous passage in Edith Wharton's memoirs in which she enquires why the characters in *The Golden Bowl* exist in a vacuum, why Henry James had stripped them of all the human fringes we necessarily trail after us through life. He replied: "My dear - I didn't know I had." Like James, Ruth Pawher Jhabvala excels at the confrontation of character. She obviously knows why she has stripped down the human fringes, but I am not sure that her readers will.

## Winter Haiku

Hoarfrost on birch-bark:  
the hours we lose together:  
snowberries in fog

A wind's white pawprints:  
the truth is a frozen word,  
his prophet the snow

In the teeth of ice  
you fold up my breath against  
lockjaw, the gnashed skin

An oval partridge  
by a roadside, freezing, clings  
to the huddled sun

The years, cold water  
slipping through our hands, old light  
melts before our eyes

Mark Abley

# An imitation game

Andrew Hislop

PETER ACKROYD

The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde  
185pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.  
0 241 10964 7

In his first novel Peter Ackroyd rewrote *Little Dorrit*. In *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* he turns his talents to one of the most renowned purveyors and purloiners of words. Superficially, he has written what Wilde did not write - a journal of the last months of his life, but this "historical fiction" is a little of what "happened" during this time. Its main concern is to explain what went before. To do so it rewrites Wilde - employs, mutates, promotes, even mutilates his writings, sayings and actions. Ackroyd has adopted the mask of a man who wrote that "it is only when you give the poet a mask that he can tell you the truth". The result is inevitably two-faced and the truth of *The Last Testament*, though redolent with fact, is a fiction. But this is not inappropriate for a man who was in many of his aspects (and certainly not always in a pejorative sense) two-faced. Wilde, who could show a feminine as well as a masculine countenance, thought "A man's face is his autobiography. A woman's face is her work of fiction." By adopting the mask of biographical fiction Ackroyd gives us Wilde both ways.

The relationship between an author and his works, between the cultivation through conversation of a "personality" and the art of writing, was a subject which Wilde delighted in and was tormented by: "J'ai mis mon génie dans mes oeuvres; je n'ai mis que mon talent dans mes oeuvres". His trials gave further poignancy to this relationship (Wilde, though able to defend his works when they were speaking for themselves and to transcend them when they appeared to be speaking against himself, condemned himself on occasion by being unable to control his brilliant conversational retorts). And he probably would not object to Ackroyd's making him continue his exploration of the relationship beyond the grave. ("One's real life is so often the life that one does not lead.") When alive he was always tolerant to the point of generosity of colourful and even pale imitations of his personality. (There were a number of theatrical burlesques of Wilde, the most famous of them the closest imitation being in the person of a French verse by Pierre Louys.

Ackroyd, not surprisingly, makes great play with both the imitations of Wilde - he makes much imaginative use of the occasion when Howson, who played a Wildean figure in *Patience*, and their friends are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation" is correct, he might well wish to rewrite himself.

## A fabulous fortune

T. J. Binyon

STEPHEN VIZINCZEY

An Innocent Millionaire  
388pp. Hamish Hamilton. £8.95.  
0 241 10929 9

Mark Niven, the innocent millionaire of the title and the hero of Stephen Vizinczey's first novel for some twenty years, a book which was twelve years in the writing, is the son of an unsuccessful American actor whose existence of a better-known English actor with the same surname. On a day trip to Toledo - the Nivens are living in Spain at the time - to celebrate Mark's fourteenth birthday, his parents tell him that they are about to separate, and his father gives him a Spanish book about sunken treasure. One chapter of this story concerns the Flori, a 230-ton brig which went down off the northwestern Bahamas carrying 29,267 diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and amethysts, 11,254 pearls, 743,050 gold doubloons, 17 tons of gold bullion and a host of minor treasures. Over the next years the wreck becomes an obsession with Mark: he searches libraries and archives throughout Europe for clues as to its position. Finally he makes it to the Bahamas, has an affair with the wife of a chemist in millinaire (herself a millionaire, in her own right), finds the Flori and gets

entangled with a crooked art dealer and a host of shyster lawyers. Vizinczey makes no secret of his belief that no man practising law, no matter how prestigious his firm, can ever be honest.

However, it is practically impossible to summon up any sympathy for Mark in his travails after learning, as early as page 35, that when visiting libraries he carries with him a razor-blade in order to cut out from books and manuscripts any passages that may be of interest to him: after reading this one can only wish him a far more rapid and stickier end than any the complacent author might have in store for him. In its bulk and in some of its thematic preoccupations this novel comes close to the Harold Robbins end of the market, but differs from it in not having enough characters, enough plot, enough violence, or even - strangely for a work from the pen of the author of *In Praise of Older Women* - enough sex. Indeed, closer inspection reveals that Mark's world exists at one remove even from fictional reality. Even more worryingly, many of the actions appear to bear symbolic or even allegorical significance, while the narrative is positively life with aphoristic utterance, often portentously italicized. In other words what one had instinctively suspected from the beginning is, unfortunately true: the novel is a morality, a fable; Vizinczey has brought us to date and blown up big enough to fill a hoarding the size of Times Square.

The central conceit, expressed by the contradiction of the title, is neatly concocted, and the author had pleasure in working out its various ramifications through Mark's experiences or those of Marianne, his millionaire mistress. Most of the author's apophthegms are of the same type; turn a conventional attitude upside-down to obtain a new view of life. Self-interest or greed is the key to human behaviour, and the lawyer is thus seen as the paradigm of social man. There can be no doubt that the author gets and gives a good deal of amusement out of this kind of thing, as when the sullen looks of the girls garlanding semi-nude up and down the Croisette during the Cannes film festival are attributed to the realization that "there were just not enough ugly rich men in the world".

Only a glib or glibless reader is likely to find the ideas shockingly new, titillatingly daring, or deeply revelatory of the basic depravity of man. Like Voltaire, Vizinczey tells a good story which slips easily down the throat; but, unlike *Candide*, *An Innocent Millionaire* proves to be a euphuistic mash throughout.

*Silence, Exile and Cunning: the Fiction of Ruth Pawher Jhabvala* (325pp. Sargent Books. 51 Manchester Square, London W1M 3PB. £9.50. 0 86131 379 8) by Yassin Gooantrani contains an introductory chapter on the novelist's life and chapters on each of her novels (eight in all).

continually uses Wilde to justify his use of Wilde, though often it is not exactly Wilde but pseudo-Wilde or just plain Ackroyd who, though clever and witty, at times very witty in a Wildean way, never matches the rhetoric of the original at his most majestic. Numerous references are made by him to the Wilde to such themes as literary property, imitation changing not the impersonator but the impersonated, the meaning of Wilde's life existing in the mind of others, an artist's life being determined by what he forgets not what he remembers, borrowing other voices, mastering masks, art and life finding their highest expression in parody, etc. We are shown Wilde dipping into Landor's *Imaginary Conversations of Literary Men and Statesmen* and with reference to his own exercise in speculative biography, *The Portrait of Mr WH* (which argued that Shakespeare's sonnets were addressed to a boy actor), he boldly declares "It was of no concern to me if the facts were accurate or inaccurate: I discerned a truth which was larger than that of biography and history." He even records in his journal his friends remarking on the inaccuracy of his journal.

*The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* is, without doubt, a remarkable achievement. What is less certain is what it has achieved. Ackroyd has played a clever but precarious game. The reader is required to have a certain knowledge to know that the game is being played (and that Ackroyd's suggestion, for instance, that Wilde's mother told him during his trials that he was illegitimate is a truth larger than history). Too much knowledge, however, threatens the artifice of the novel's authority. The Wildean scholar who knows every source, and marks every diversion from the "accepted" truth will see exactly where Ackroyd lurks behind the mask. And because Ackroyd has chosen a medium in which it is difficult to find him, the discovery of his presence destroys his subject much more so than if he were an actor obviously playing Wilde. The audience accept an actor as a subject; they mask him because it is obvious that he is another. Ackroyd's success at interesting his readers will drive them to other writings which will unmask him and make his efforts redundant. Perhaps in his next novel he will use his many talents to show more of himself. But then if Wilde's opinion that "Most people are other people's thoughts" is correct, then the reader's thoughts, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation" is correct, he might well wish to rewrite himself.

APRIL 1983







## American notes

### Christopher Hitchens

Norman Mailer has stayed away from fiction for over ten years. He would probably describe his imminent return to it as a "comeback". Certainly, his fondness for pugilistic metaphors remains as great as ever. *Ancient Evenings*, the first volume of his projected trilogy set in Pharaonic Egypt, which is due out in May, even sounds like a session of bleary reminiscence with Jake La Motta. And, as Mailer himself puts it in a forthcoming interview with *Harvard Magazine*:

By the time you reach your sixties, you feel as if you're in the twelfth round and you're battered. . . . It may be that part of remaining a writer is to ring yourself more and more with various protections.

Arguably, but, as the interview proceeds, Mailer dons the gunshield and gloves and finds himself conceding the oddest points. He tells the questioner (his student and admirer Robert Begbie) that:

I'm a great believer in karma. I do believe that we're not here just one time, and I don't have any highly-organized theology behind that - it's just a passing conviction that keeps returning. Karma tends to make more sense than a world conceived without it, because when you think of the incredible elaborations that go into any one human being, it does seem wasteful of the cosmos to send us out just once to learn all these things, and then molder forever in the weeds.

So, the two-fisted Mailer has taken refuge in psychobabble. He says, unthinkingly, that "I don't think it's an accident that I'm a novelist". On the same footing is his opinion that "probably a social evening in Egypt in that period three thousand years ago was as interesting as an evening in New York today". Which, when one recalls some of Mailer's New York evenings, is as lame a remark as one could meet with in a day's journey. Only once does a flash of the old fighter show itself. That's when he avers, with apparent seriousness, that:

Movie stars fascinate me. Their lives are so unlike anyone else's. You could almost postulate they come from another planet. The way of life of the movie star speaks of another order of existence.

Tautology aside, Fitzgerald and

Hemingway could hardly have put it more pitifully.

Americans are, rightly, very sensitive to the charge of "cultural imperialism". They like to deprecate *Dallas* themselves, and they like to deplore the global spread of Hollywood values and MacDonald's hamburgers. But, if one can risk the generalization, they don't relish any sneering at these artefacts when it comes from other people. Their response on such occasions is akin to that of the British traveller, who will inveigh against Princess Margaret when among friends, but who bristles like a porcupine should an outsider impugn the Royal Family in the slightest. The other day, I noticed the excellent Ray Sokolov, cultural commissar at the *Wall Street Journal*, denounce European anti-American snobism as "the anti-Semitism of the Left". I wrote, but did not post, a letter to him pointing out that he thinks the Left is anti-semitic anyway.

Now, Ariel Dorfman has taken a deep breath and exhaled with *The Empire's Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babe and Other Innocent Heroes Do To Our Minds*. As a Chilean exile, Dorfman has a relationship of friendly but guarded co-existence with the United States. He's enthralled by Donald Duck, enchanted by Tomo and very much taken with Superman. However, a stern sense of the fitness of things compels him to decode the apparently innocuous and challenge the ideas and images which he thinks are being transmitted. I think he reads too much into Babar the Elephant, but he's written a very witty and clever chapter on the *Reader's Digest*. Here, Dorfman believes, is the *summa* of Middle American wisdom. Its very title - in Spanish it is published as *Selecciones* - implies a comprehensive, universal access of knowledge, a hoard of omniscience from which the guardians have judiciously chosen the best. How touching is the reminder that the April 1980 issue contained two pieces ("Manhattan: Neurotic and Fascinating" and "China goes Shopping") which indulged the *RD*'s need to make personalities out of complex entities. How amazing to learn of the Chicago physician who prescribed the aggressive common sense of the *Digest* to patients suffering

from "worry, fear or hypochondria". How nice to be reminded that it is published, with its wondrously emollient message, from Pleasantville. In fact, everything about the *RD* is rather jolly until you remember that it is, by his own account, the President's favourite reading.

There isn't what you might call a cult of the amateur in America. The word "professional" is a compliment in all of its declensions. But there are some salient exceptions. One of them is I. F. Stone, who has occupied his retirement from journalism in the study of classical Greek, teaching himself the language and poring over the canonical texts as he once scrutinized the blue books and white papers of Washington skulduggery. Over the last few weeks huge audiences have assembled in New York and in Georgetown to hear his re-working of the trial of Socrates. Next month, he's delivering the three talks at Harvard. Briefly, Stone has imported all the brusque iconoclasm of his previous career to the exercise of proving that Plato was a sell-out. He argues that Socrates was unfairly tried and wrongly executed, but that he had been taking for it ever since the aristocrats were expelled to Eleusis. More, he believes that Socrates would not have survived any of the hierarchic Utopias proposed by his disciple (who never really pleaded a strong defence of the old man). A sample of the Stone analysis reads like this:

Socrates called himself "the gadfly of Athens". But what the hell kind of a gadfly was he when he never spoke up against slavery, or against the Sicilian expedition?

It's never been disputed that Plato and Socrates were inclined to look down upon the many-headed, and the late R. H. S. Crossman wrote famously of Plato that he was an ancestor of fascism. But Stone has gone one better by suggesting the analogy of American city politics as well as the one of modern totalitarianism.

Professional classicists have reacted with a mixture of amusement, anger and disdain. Charles Griswold commented from Howard University that

Mr Stone's recent lectures reminded me that the philosophic issues raised by Plato can be exciting to large

groups of non-specialists. It also reminds me of the soundness of Plato's pessimism about the possibility of conveying the truth to large groups of one's fellow citizens.

Others have echoed his (Griswold's) point that there is an antithesis in Plato, between the philosopher and the tyrant. Will popularization lead to enlightenment?

New Yorkers are trying to get used to a new poster, often in the shape of a one-page newspaper advertisement. A striking figure, apparently an attempt to harmonize Boadicea with the Statue of Liberty, sports a badge reading "I love New York." For the next month, the city is to be regaled with a succession of British cultural events, under the general title of *Britain Salutes New York*. The festival is to mark the bicentenary of British recognition of American independence - which in Georgian terms took the surprisingly quick time of seven years. It was from New York that the British finally departed and the city was for a brief time the capital of the United States - as, in everything but politics, it still is.

The patrons are the Prince of Wales and the First Lady, with the help of the British Council and an amorphous

entity going by the name of the "Anglo-American business community". The strongest asset of Constable and Henry Moore at the Metropolitan Museum, a loan from the Royal Academy to the National Academy of Art and the Queen's Library. Her Majesty has also been pleased to lend her Fabergé Collection, which will be on view at the Cooper Hewitt Museum. There's going to be a showing of Stanley Spencer, who is almost unknown in America, and of the paintings of Sir Winston Churchill, who is well-known but not as a painter. Other "fringe" curious chemistry of Anglophilia here - there's to be a Chelsea Flower Show, an Oxford and Cambridge boat race, and an effort was even made to import the Grimethorpe Colliery Band, a great laundering of tuxedos in the symphony orchestra and the Royal Shakespeare Company in prospect. Academics and historians are holding a symposium on Anglo-American relations, and to this Paul Channon, Minister of the Arts, enquired if he might come. One venerable professor responded graciously to this by saying, "Chips's son is always welcome."

### Author, Author

Competition No 118  
Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than May 13. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that the most nearly correct - in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.

1 Lord Henry was a great electioneer.  
Burrowing for boroughs like a rat in the earth.

2 Because the neighbouring Earl of Gifford had English influence on the self-sphere realm.

3 His son, the Honourable Discreditable, was member for the "other half" (meaning London).

The same self-interest with a different leaning.  
Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, canto 10, stanza 70.

2 One rainy afternoon Lord Curzon was entertained to deliver in the lecture hall on Fish. He readily complied, and succeeded in amusing his audience more, and instructing them as much, as any of his more pretentious brother lecturers could have done. We shall not report the lecture, but we refer those who may be curious on the subject to the meeting of the Panoplist Society, under the presidency of Lord Curzon, on the evening of 14th May, 1983, at the Peacock, *Gryll House*, chapter 18.

3 Lord Lancer is a man of honour. He loves the arts. He has declared his love in public. He never goes back on his word. But I must be off. Lord Lancer does not subscribe to the view that poets can treat time with nonchalance. Harold Pinter, *No Man's Land*, act 2.

Recently published annuals include two from Macmillan, *Thomas Hardy Annual No 1* (205pp, £20.00 333 30222 0), edited by Norman Page, and *O'Casey Annual No 2* (179pp, £20.00 333 32458 7) edited by Robert G. Lowery. The Hardy volume includes essays on "Hardy and his Biographers" by Peter J. Casagrande, "The Love Story in *Two on a Tower*" by John Bayley, "Words, in all their intimate accents" (on Hardy's metrics) by Tom Paulin, "Thomas Hardy, Donald Davie, England and the English" by John Lucas, and a survey of recent Hardy studies, with reviews and a bibliography. The O'Casey volume also has an annual bibliography and a review of the Editor's own *Essay on Sean O'Casey's Autobiography* by Michael Kennedy, who also contributes an essay on "Models and Mediators in the Autobiography of Sean O'Casey".

beside pieces by Mark Hawthorn, Wang Zhaoliang ("O'Casey in Context") and Violet M. O'Valle. *Millennium Studies*, Volume XVI (1982) by James D. Simmonds (199pp, £17.95 333 32458 7) includes essays on "The Wedding in *Paradise Lost*" by Cheryl H. Freese, "Versions of *Paradise Lost*" by Kenyon Gilbert, "The Epitaphical Garland in *Paradise Lost*" by Charlotte P. Otten, and "The Culture from the American Studies" by Robert G. Lowery. The volume also just appeared, *Chips's Son* by Paul Channon, £18.75, 0 299 09270 4. It includes an essay by Jacques Barzun, "The Quality of Light: Some Unanswered Questions" and "Didierot's America" by Jacques Choullier.

### Women Writers

I admitted in the course of my review of W. Warren Wagar's *Terrestrial Visions* (March 18) that I am still not ready to talk about "Miss" fiction, though I have turned on from the polite "Miss" to the vulgar "Jane". Whatever the Cooper Hewitt Museum, there's going to be a showing of Stanley Spencer, who is almost unknown in America, and of the paintings of Sir Winston Churchill, who is well-known but not as a painter. Other "fringe" curious chemistry of Anglophilia here - there's to be a Chelsea Flower Show, an Oxford and Cambridge boat race, and an effort was even made to import the Grimethorpe Colliery Band, a great laundering of tuxedos in the symphony orchestra and the Royal Shakespeare Company in prospect. Academics and historians are holding a symposium on Anglo-American relations, and to this Paul Channon, Minister of the Arts, enquired if he might come. One venerable professor responded graciously to this by saying, "Chips's son is always welcome."

ANTHONY BURGESS,  
4 Rue Grimaldi, 98000 Monaco.

### Churchill in Pink Silk

In his review of *The Goebbels Years 1939-1941* (March 18) Harold Pinter suggests that the Nazis' most violent political speaker was inspired in his fantasy of British official decadence by his belief that Churchill wore pink silk underwear. He was no fantasy. Churchill did wear pink silk underwear and to the best of my recollection it was at least blue-velvet, something between "velvet" and "cuisse de nymphe aimée".

ALASTAIR FORBES,  
1031 Chateau d'Oex, Switzerland.

### Peter Porter

In Blake Morrison's illuminating and rightly praised study of Peter Porter's *Collected Poems* (April 18), there are nevertheless small lacunae.

The line in the early poem "Metamorphosis" "I am only the only force upon the world" is not the only image. Porter's "Nine O'Clock Thoughts on the Other" is dated 1962/3 in the *Collected Poems*, and "The World of Simon" appeared in *Poems Ancient & Modern* in 1964. The two poems of "Office Friendships" and "The House Party" which Morrison implies were models for Porter's *Collected Poems* (April 18) were written later. "Office Friendships" is in *Pleasures of the Poet* (1966) and "The House Party" is in *Be My Guest!* (1975). The poem Porter was directly inspired by was Simon Raven poem. Porter's "Metamorphosis" is a use of fantasy imagery in the "Sordid Creek" poem to imitate him. "Office Friendships" was an attempt to write a poem like Auden's "The Love Feast" in the upper room at midnight. . . .

GAVIN EWART,  
Keilworth Court, Lower Richmond Road, London SW15.

Blake Morrison, in reviewing my book *Collected Poems of Peter Porter* (April 18), refers to that author's "brief response to the Group" which "never seemed for much even in the 1960s". The Group was not anything that Porter ever wrote. It was a creative seminar whose purpose was to work the work of young writers to the work of their contemporaries. Porter's sheets of work to be read were circulated before each meeting, and meetings were held over periods roughly corresponding to university terms.

I have before me a complete file of Porter's work, from late 1960 to when I started it, to summer 1970, when it adapted itself into the 12 of *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, from the American Studies, also just appeared, *Chips's Son* by Paul Channon, £18.75, 0 299 09270 4. It includes an essay by Jacques Barzun, "The Quality of Light: Some Unanswered Questions" and "Didierot's America" by Jacques Choullier.

and they amount to more than half the quotations in his review. No one can be sure how far an audience affects a poet or, indeed, the poet his audience; but these facts suggest that Peter Porter's connection with the Group was less transient than Blake Morrison alleges.

PHILIP HOBBSBAUM,  
Department of English, The University, Glasgow.

### 'The Sacred Executioner'

Sir, - I, Duncan M. Derrett (April 1) professes to find ludicrous the thesis of my book, *The Sacred Executioner*, that antisemitism has arisen from the role of the Jews in the Christian myth as executioners of the Divine sacrifice. The conveners of Vatican Council II did not find this thesis ludicrous when they sought to absolve the Jews of the charge of decide with its accompanying doctrine of the accursedness of the Jews. Nor did the Fathers of the Church who declared that the curse of Cain was upon the Jews. Professor Derrett is apparently unaware of the mass of evidence that has been collected by Christian writers such as Malcolm Hay, Friedrich Heer, Rosemary Ruether, James Parkes and many others to show Christian responsibility for antisemitism. His complacency is forcibly becoming rare among thinking Christians, as recent articles and letters in *The Times* show.

Since Derrett does not give the slightest indication of my line of argument, but merely holds up to ridicule one garbled detail after another, may I explain how anthropological considerations enter into my thesis? The role of the Jews in the Christian myth, I argue, is similar to that of dark figures in previous myths associated with human sacrifice: examples are Set, in Egyptian mythology, and Loki, in Scandinavian mythology. These figures, as a wealth of anthropological data makes probable, derive from a ritual practice of cursing and driving into the desert the performer of the necessary sacrifice, so that the tribe is saved from the curse which it achieves salvation in the Christian myth, the role of dark figure or Sacred Executioner is performed individually by the anonymous Judas, and collectively by the Jewish people.

Derrett, however, has his own explanation of antisemitism: it is due to the Jews' "self-imposed, and . . . lachrymose endogamy". Translated into English, this means that the Jews brought antisemitism on themselves by their gloomy, self-pitying, Gentile-hating exclusiveness, shown especially in their ban on intermarriage. This view is not so much an explanation of antisemitism as a manifestation of it. In fact, the Jewish ban on intermarriage with non-Christians is exactly parallel with the Christian ban on intermarriage with non-Jews: ie, it is a protection of the faith, not an expression of racialism or hatred.

Derrett states that I have left out of my book an all-important fact: "The ancient Jews (and many of their descendants) share the genuine oriental concept of immensity of age, that the sufferings of the just are an atonement for the wicked." This "fact", Derrett presumably means, refutes my contention that the Hebrew Bible opposes the concept of vicarious atonement. What, then, does Derrett make of the passages in the Hebrew Bible that explicitly oppose the idea that one man's suffering can atone for the sins of others? "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children; neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut 24:16; see also II Kings 14:16; II Chronicles 25:4; Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:20). On the basis of such teachings, Jewish thinkers such as Nachmanides rejected the Christian doctrine of Original Sin and Vicarious Atonement which blamed Adam's sin on his descendants, and also declared it expiable by another's suffering.

Many modern scholars argue that Jesus was a Pharisee teacher who was executed as a rebel by the Romans because he was a claimant to the Jewish throne, ie, a messiah-figure. Derrett dismisses this view as unworthy of discussion. In the process, he also dismisses the bulk of modern Biblical scholarship, including the work of Rudolf Bultmann. Only he, Derrett, is aware of the true point of departure, which is to regard Jesus as one who believed in a "super-religion", who believed "he could redeem all cultures from the burden of their common inheritance (they were all slaves to sin)". This windy stuff is to be substituted for the modern effort to see Jesus in his Jewish background as a Jewish teacher and activist. This effort, however, will not be halted by Professor Derrett's pathetic obscurantism.

HYAM MACCOBY,  
Leo Baeck College, Manor House, Finchley, London N3.

### Catullus

Sir, - Freddy Hurd-Jones (Letters, February 4) and James Michie may be amateurs, but they are not necessarily fools. Whatever deference may be due to scholarly opinion, Christopher Since's claims (Letters, March 18) go beyond the bounds of good manners and good sense. On this, as on all other matters, we can safely assume that scholarly opinion is divided.

Two points, then, in favour of the amateurs: (a) *tristis* may be "hopelessly rare", but there is not much doubt that it is a frequentative of *trudere*. So to translate *tristis* as "wanking" is as unlikely (at least) as to take *puellae* as a dative of advantage. (And how, by the way, did Catullus know what he was wanking about?)

(b) For purely technical reasons it is very unlikely that the poem describes anything that actually happened. *Vir femina supina, facile vir promiss, si movere possit*: the action described in the last line would not be possible without the strong assistance of a third party. The scene described is "hilarious" - we are told so six times in four lines, rather repetitively; it only takes three more to describe the incident and complete the poem. Whatever the identity of the girl, she would have to be there for the incident to be as comical as Catullus expects us to find it.

I doubt if Cato believed, or was intended to believe, that the scene was a real one. What he was expected to laugh at was the product of Catullus' lewd and comic fancy. The alternative explanation, we can safely assume, depicts a scene (and indeed a mentality) that borders on the punitive and severe.

D. B. TAYLOR,  
Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford.

### 'Edmund Ironside'

Sir, - May I present the other side of the coin on the authorship of the two anonymous plays which Eric Sams (August 13, 1982) would like to see as early works by Shakespeare? If one is willing to accept vocabulary statistics as evidence in such cases, then the greatest weight should be given to those statistics which use the full vocabulary and less weight to such methods as used by Eliot Slater (Letters, March 18) which use only a small sample. I, myself, employ two methods: one, relative vocabulary overlap, is similar to Slater's rare word overlap, except that it uses all the words of the text being compared; the other is a cluster analysis employing the forty most frequently used words in Elizabethan letters.

A cluster analysis of forty-one Elizabethan letters, anonymous and attributed, supports Slater's finding that the anonymous play *Edward III* clusters closely with the anonymous *Henry VI* plays, having Euclidean distances to them of 3.747 (in a range of 2.223 per cent for the two *Timon* plays) to 20.343 per cent between Marlowe's *Pastorals* and *Shepherd and Poems by the Countess of Pembroke*. It also clusters somewhat more closely with both parts of the anonymous *King John* at 3.275 per cent and 4.104 per cent

respectively. However, it clusters most closely of all with Robert Greene's *Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay* at 3.152 per cent. Considering that Robert Greene wrote a similar play, *James IV*, about a love-sick, warlike king, he is the likely author of *Edward III*. In a ranking of vocabulary size for eighty Elizabethan texts which I have compiled, there arises a further difficulty in accepting *Edward III* as an early play by Shakespeare, in that it ranks higher than any play by Shakespeare except *Henry V* - the large vocabulary of the latter play arising from the scenes in French. Again, *Edward III* is more likely the work of an older, university-trained writer like Greene, than of a young, relatively un-schooled Shakespeare. In the frequency of common words the Euclidean distance between *Ironside* and *Edward III* is 8.361 per cent. Whereas, like most plays by Shakespeare, *Edward III* has "the" as the most frequent word, in *Ironside* the word "the" is the third most frequent word (after "and" and "to").

LOUIS LULE,  
27 Mustang Road, Rolling Hills, California 90274.

### 'The Rare Art Traditions'

Sir, - Martin Kemp's arithmetic in his review of Joseph Alsop's *The Rare Art Traditions* (March 25) is sadly awry if he thinks that an increase in value from five florins to 1,500 represents a gain of 300 per cent. A gain of 300 per cent would amount to fifteen florins, giving a present value of twenty florins. In fact the value increased 300-fold, the actual gain being 295 times the original value - that is, 29,900 per cent!

PHILIP M. DE PARIS,  
5 Gold Street, Stalbridge, Dorset.

### Dictionaries and Trade Marks

Sir, - I suppose it is unlikely that many of your readers will have paid attention to the EEC draft directive on trade marks. It does, however, contain a provision which directly concerns scholars and editors of literary works of reference.

Both the directive and the accompanying draft regulation (articles 4 and 9 respectively) will impose a legal duty on "publishers of a dictionary, encyclopaedia or similar work" to ensure that any reproduction of a word which is also used as a trade mark shall indicate that it is a registered trade mark. The purpose of this innovation is to hinder the effect of common usage turning a successful trade mark (eg *Biro*) into a generic term.

It is, however, an inadmissible introduction into English law of a vested interest distorting the function of a dictionary, which is to reflect actual use of words rather than their legal status. Editors have a difficult enough time as it is realising the attempts of human rights groups to censor unfortunate uses of racial names; they will need to be even more vigilant to resist the similar attempts of business groups.

Neither the Commission's explanatory memorandum nor the report of the House of Lords scrutiny committee nor the debates in the European Parliament show any awareness of a literary interest in this issue. Publishers of works of reference owe no duty to trade-mark owners as a class: their duties are rather to their readers and to scholarship. It must therefore remain an editorial decision based on linguistic usage whether to define a "caterpillar tractor" as a "tractor with two endless metal belts" (*Shorter OED*) or as a trade mark applied to "earth-mixing and mechanical handling equipment" (*UK Press Gazette Guide to Registered Trade-names*).

May one hope that even at this late stage representations can be made to the Commission and Government for the removal of this noxious provision? NEVILLE MARCHE HUNNINGS,  
11 Russell Hill, Purley, Surrey.

### 'The English Hero'

Sir, - As I said in my earlier letter (March 11), I have no unreasonable expectation that Robert Halsband would read my essay, even if he was reviewing it. His answer (Letters, April 1) indicates that he has stirred himself to read the title, which contains a quotation from Swift, which he has misunderstood. Swift was talking about refusing ("declining") a lofty style, and the essay was concerned with this refusal, which extended to mock-heroic. How Halsband then "slipped into the error of assuming the declining style and heroic strain amounted to the mock-heroic", and what he "jotted down" in his notes on that occasion, are doubtless matters of absorbing autobiographical interest.

But since nobody could be expected to have the slightest idea of what the essay was about from Halsband's review, may I be permitted to say that it dealt with the theme of heroic self-portrayal ("self-apology"), notably in the *Verses on the Death*, and with Swift's self-consciousness about adopting heroic postures? Readers acquainted with Swift's poems might think this theme (whatever the merits of the essay) not quite as unrelated to a volume on *The English Hero 1660-1800* as Mr Halsband's reading of his own jottings appears to suggest to him.

CLAUDE RAWSON,  
Department of English, University of Warwick, Coventry.

### 'Trial by Jury'

Sir, - I fear that Sir Zelman Cowen's memory of Gilbert's *Trial by Jury* (April 1) has failed him. The judge had risen to his position not by marrying a rich attorney's elderly, ugly daughter, but only by being engaged to her. When his practice began to flourish, he jilted her: that was his qualification for trying a breach of promise of marriage. It will be remembered that the judge dealt with the case by marrying the plaintiff.

PHILIP TAIT,  
57 Regan Court, Empire Way, Wembley, Middlesex.

### Newspapers in Germany

Sir, - In his review of John Retzlack's play *Berlin, Berlin* (Commentary, March 11), Ronald Hayman takes him to task for not knowing "that there are no national daily papers in Germany", but this is not so. There are at least two national dailies, Axel Springer's *Die Welt* and *Bild* (a tabloid), as well as a number of most influential and important supra-regional dailies such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* to "close or narrow the gap between public events and private life".

They can be bought at every bookshop throughout West Germany. EVA BORNEMANN,  
Scharthen, Austria.

### The Tiptoft Chronicle

Sir, - R. B. Dobson in reviewing Antonia Graydon's *Historical Writing in England*, volume II (March 18) repeats her statement that the chronicle attributed to John Tiptoft is lost. It may be useful to point out that the only known manuscript is now HM 19960 in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and will be described in greater detail in the catalogue of its medieval manuscripts now at prospecting publication.

A. J. DOYLE,  
University Library, Palace Green, Durham.

The introductory essay to the catalogue of the exhibition of drawings by Henry William Bunbury, reviewed on March 11, is written by John Rely. We apologise for misspelling his name.

### Among this week's contributors

SIR DARRELL BATES's most recent book, *The Abyssinian Difficulty*, was published in 1980.

T. J. BINYON's crime novel, *Svan Song*, was published last year.

JAMES BOOTH is the author of *Writers and Politics in Nigeria*, 1981.

SARAH BRADFORD's *Disraeli* was published in 1982.

J. A. BURROW is the author of *Medieval Writers and Their Work*, 1982.

ERIK DE MAUNY was the BBC Moscow Correspondent from 1963 to 1966, and 1972 to 1974.

MARTIN DODSWORTH is the editor of *English*.

J. D. FAOR is Professor of African History at the University of Birmingham.

ROY FOSTER's *Lord Randolph Churchill: A Political Life* was published in 1981.

GEORFREY GRISON's most recent book, *Freedom of the Parish*, was published last year.

CHRISTOPHER HAIGH's books include *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire*, 1975.

JOSÉ HARRIS is a Fellow of St Catherine's College, Oxford, and the author of *William Beveridge: A Biography*, 1977.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS is Washington Correspondent for *The Nation*.

N. M. HORSFALL is a lecturer in Greek and Latin at University College London.

MICHAEL HOWARD is Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford.

DENIS JUDD is the author of *Lord Reading*, 1982.

JONATHAN KEATES teaches English at the City of London School.

PETER KEMP's *H. G. Wells and the Cultivating Age* was published earlier this year.

ANGELA LEIGHTON is a lecturer in the English Department at the University of Hull. Her *Shelley and the Sublime* will be published next year.

P. S. LEWIS is the author of *Later Medieval France: the Poetry*, 1968.

ALAN MACKAY is a lecturer in Crystallography at Birkbeck College, London.

WILLIAM MANN is the author of *Richard Strauss: A Critical Study of the Operas*, 1964.

RUTH MCCURRY is Joint Editor of the quarterly magazine *Christian*.

DAVID NOKES is a lecturer in English at King's College London.

REDMOND O'HANLON has contributed essays to *The Darwinian Heritage: A Centennial Retrospect*, to be published this year.

RAYMOND PLANT is Professor of Politics at the University of Southampton. A revised and extended version of his *Hegel*, 1973, is to be published later this year.

JOHN SKORUPSKI's *Symbol and Theory*, 1976, appeared in paperback earlier this year.

PAUL SMITH is Professor of Modern History at the University of Southampton.

THOMAS SUTCLIFFE is a Producer for BBC Radio.

WILLIAM THOMAS is a Student of Christ Church, Oxford.

EDWARD TIMMS is a Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.



# Doing without the gods

N. M. Horsfall

GORDON WILLIAMS

Technique and Ideas in the *Aeneid*  
301pp. Yale University Press. £22.50.  
0 300 02852 0

Virgilian studies in English creep unswervingly – a handful of commentaries excepted – towards their nadir. That does not mean that the topic is drained dry by generations of scholarly effort. Far from it; we lack, for example, adequate commentaries on two-thirds of the *Aeneid*. But, mysteriously, Virgil has nowhere and never attracted the very best of Latinists, above all in the post-war English-speaking world, as ten years of reviewing books on the *Aeneid* grimly confirms. Such progress as there is tends to be in articles; the books which might summarize what we have learned and thrust forward our understanding are not written.

Gordon Williams, progressing from a fellowship at Balliol to chairs of Latin at St Andrews and Yale, awakens expectations: the first of his four big books, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry*, quite contrary to its unfortunate and universally employed acronym, has now served as a prolix but vigorous stimulant to readers of Latin for fifteen years. He deserved, and won, admiration for the synthesis achieved between the linguistic and historical understanding of Roman poetry, symbolized by Edward Fraenkel, the teacher to whom he has paid warm tribute, and the literary analysis of poetic texts, where he has attempted to close the gap as Latin pants along a good lap behind English

in the sophistication of its critical techniques.

Williams addresses himself to two questions: first, whether the *Aeneid* is a poem about the mythical world, linked non-integrally to the present, or about "the world of normal human experience, with a poetic claim to historical reality"; and second, "what ideas are expressed in the epic and how can they be recognised as such." That "normal human experience" is the right answer to the first question, all serious students of Virgil, at least post-war, have recognized. To the colossal perspectives his second question opens, he devotes explicitly thirteen pages, and though he is of course right to insist that the *Aeneid* is rich in ideas of powerful personal and historical import, densely expressed and often standing in unresolved conflict, while containing no dominant ideology, readers may feel thwarted by the absence of extended and systematic discussion of the second topic.

The gods dominate the book by their absence: Neptune enraged peering forth from the waves, Iris slipping through the sky on her yellow wings, Juno tossing her head in fury are no more. Williams is beset by a compulsion to demythologize the *Aeneid*: for him the gods are figures (or tropes), means whereby the poet expresses his own judgments without obtruding upon the narrative, means to embody or personify human motivation, means to resolve the conflicting claims of free will and determinism. Fate, predictably, fares no better. This consistently overstated argument includes trenchantly expressed and still valuable paragraphs, whose truth has in many cases not been in doubt this century: Richard Heinze published his splendid

and unsurpassed study of the *Aeneid* in 1902 (4th edition, 1928) and his chapter on "Das Übernatürliche" already indicates just how best to handle Virgil's gods.

Two small observations of detail should indicate the dangers of Williams's extremism. First, he claims for Virgil as original the conception of Fate as suggesting the inevitability of Roman history in the years between Aeneas and the *Aeneid*. Bafflingly, however, no mention is made of Naevius' "Punic War", a short pre-hexameter epic composed two centuries before Virgil. There Jupiter consoled Aeneas' mother Venus "with hope of things to come" and Venus actually gave Aeneas' father Anchises books "containing the future." That text Virgil and his readers knew intimately: the *Aeneid*'s prophecies of Roman history are indissoluble from their literary antecedents. Williams's *Aeneid* is modernized and secularized, unacceptably; it remains a poem of the most complex literary resonances and though Virgil's gods of course express an individual vision, they are simultaneously the gods of Homer, Naevius and Ennius and cannot be reduced in a paragraph to perfect compatibility with the non-theology of Epicurus and Lucretius.

Secondly, Williams updates Virgil's portents and prodigies; he finds that their interpretation is purely in terms of ideas and emotions already existing in the persons concerned. Neither Jupiter nor Fate can send them: they do not exist. The sequence of two portents and an oracle early in Book Seven, for example, suggests otherwise: they sow dissent between King Latinus and Queen Amata, they point away from Prince Turnus of Ardea as a fit suitor for their daughter

Lavinia, and towards the late-arrived, unknown stranger Aeneas. They surprise, confuse and dismay the human actors. Though Williams is of course right to insist that the *Aeneid* does not constitute evidence that Virgil held a given set of beliefs, the sense of extra-terrestrial forces which the poem conveys is far from being eliminated.

Williams makes modest claims for the translations which accompany his copious quotations; they show, actually, that he has thought long and hard about the innumerable problems of interpretation and language in the poem and will help both students and specialists. But it is very hard to determine the book's audience. It is almost bare of notes; the bibliography is individualistic, as the author allows, and frankly inadequate. Thus only specialists will realize that the rare glow of learning which illuminates page 205 derives from an article published in Cambridge (UK) in 1975, and fewer still, that a dozen pages on the function of the figure of apostrophe re-cover matters fully treated in five studies from the period 1900-1925. Whether the intention was to save money or to woo non-specialists, it is misconceived.

Such coyness helps no one and serves to disguise two grave issues. First, the strong sense that behind the modernities of terminology there lurks a conservative and derivative book, is perfectly possible to say new things about the *Aeneid*, but few will be found here. It is also true that much of what Williams says, though chiefly reflecting preoccupations of the period 1900-39 with narrative technique, with inconsistencies of structure and changes of plan in the unfinished epic and with problems of fate and free will, for example, can indeed stand

exhumation. Bibliographical specialists, muttering the names of Helmut Eduard Norden, Prescott, Carlsen, Matthiae, Crump and others long forgotten, will reach for their telephones and reconstruct Williams's curiously old-fashioned schedule of reading and intellectual horizons.

Second, the *Aeneid* as Williams presents it has a strange flavour: an essential ingredient in the poem's texture is missing. Arguments are pursued vigorously, even locked through the poem, but the code imposes his own moulds and patterns and presents Virgil as a man of ideas, rather than words. Far and away the most learned poet of Roman antiquity expected readers of similar culture, if Williams's argumentative and largely pages the issues discussed are largely stripped of their history. Many of Virgil's unresolved ambiguities and inconsistencies are themselves inherited from complex literary antecedents, which the poet often simply preferred not to disentangle, of which, not a word. Concern for the poet's sources would have illuminated, not impeded the argument. Perhaps an inevitable consequence of Williams's approach is an unfortunate crop of misunderstandings and errors of detail.

Inexplicably, Virgil has come to bring out the worst in his critics' eyes. Ever since O's influential *Vergil* (1963), a striking study in baroque prose, new standards of unreadability are repeatedly attained. Williams does not disappoint, though readers have from his *Figures of Thought* may be going easier. For all the well-hidden and pleasantly out-dated merits of *Technique and Ideas*, it is a melancholy reflection that the cost per page has risen some 1300 per cent since the indispensable *TORP* (1968).

JEREMY CHERFAS  
Man Made Life: A Genetic Engineering Primer  
270pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £16 (paperback, £5.50).  
0 631 13026 8

PAUL AND ANNE EHRLICH  
Extinction: The Causes and Consequences of the Disappearance of Species  
350pp. Gallancz. £9.95.  
0 351 03114 X

IRVING LESTER  
The Descent of Darwin: A Handbook of Doubts about Darwinism  
110pp. Collins. £7.95.  
0 215 9548 8

PHILIP KITCHER  
Abusing Science: The Case against Creationism  
310pp. MIT Press. £10.50.  
0 262 11085 7

With the advance of molecular biology out of the laboratory into the factory and the hospital, possibilities for genetic engineering, talked about since at least Huxley's *Brave New World*, have become realities, and political and social discussions of evolution have consequently sharpened. Hundreds of books reflect problems of evolution at the various levels of organization, from molecules to individual life. Every day, discoveries about the fundamental genetic machinery are being made which have consequences for the whole edifice. Science in general, too, with its scientific theory and mathematical ecology, is steadily improving our understanding of the behaviour of complex systems. Altogether we may expect a big re-synthesis of our picture of evolution – certainly any picture today must be transitory.

The greatest discovery of our century has been that, parallel to the structures of proteins and the other substances which make up the biochemical pathways of a living matter, there is an informational system made of the same atoms which describe the proteins in another language: that of DNA. It is as if an anthropologist, come from another world to study our material civilization, had left the Ethnographic Society of the British Museum and wandered into the Reading Room.

In the library of genetic material to which we have recently gained access, we have learnt our ABC and are now working through the grammar. Indeed, Jeremy Chérfas's book *Man Made Life* (no hyphen!) is correctly subtitled "A Genetic Engineering Primer" and teaches us how to form simple sentences in the language of life. The procedures are like those of word-processing and the catalogues of restriction enzymes and complex biochemicals are, with good reason, like those of integrated circuits and components for the computer.

Nature is dialectical. The DNA sequences determine the protein molecules which make up and operate the organism, which itself regenerates the DNA sequences and passes them on in edited form. Informational structures are material, like the rest of the organism, and subject to the same laws of chemistry. In passing from one structure to the other, from information to structure and back, the joint system evolves. Each cell in a multi-cellular organism has a copy, written in DNA, of the instructions for the building and operation of the whole organism, just as each member of a theocratic society has a copy of the Holy Book. The system is of exquisite complexity and the implications of what is being found at the molecular level are only gradually affecting our understanding of animal populations. Indeed, since even the process of the development of a complete organism from the fertilized egg is not well understood, particularly as regards the euphonious unfolding of all its parts and subsystems, it is difficult to discuss the steps by which these organs and all the machinery and programs for their operation were developed in the past. Nevertheless, we have to discuss a complex system as best we can at all levels simultaneously, since a man consists of some 10<sup>14</sup> atoms which cannot even in principle be analysed individually, although many events at the atomic level are important for the understanding of his functioning.

Darwin himself had only a vague idea of what the hereditary material might be like – he lived before atoms and molecules had become familiar. Traditionally, Darwinism has been anthropology without language – only one side of the essential duality was visible. Today's "Neo-Darwinism" embodies the adjustments which the received view of Darwinian evolution has had to make to adapt itself to the findings of molecular biology. Darwin began with large organisms and

Alan Mackay

geological spans of time. Today people work with micro-organisms and periods of days. Remarkably, there is good agreement on many issues. Evolution, as observed for finches, works at the molecular level too.

Hitherto men and animals have chosen mates for themselves and for others, and the DNA which was selected for propagation depended on the survival of the organism generated to breed in its turn. Stock-breeding, agriculture and medicine have controlled heredity by selecting those who would mate to produce new combinations of existing characteristics (Australia selects only one in six of prospective immigrants to produce new mates who would have desirable characters.) Now a new way is opening up, the direct editing of the instructions. A decade ago, biological engineers were working like pigeon-fanciers, selecting organisms for desirable characteristics, such as the ability to metabolize oil wastes into protein, essentially intensifying the process of natural selection. Only those cells which could survive on diet provided were able to reproduce. Now, as Chérfas explains, the genetic instructions are edited to produce an organism which does what is wanted. The instructions for producing human insulin can be inserted into the genome of a bacterium which then makes human insulin for harvesting and sale. Chérfas gives a technical but fascinating account of what can be done, how it is done and what it may mean for medicine, society and business.

Each extant species represents irreplaceable knowledge on the hoof, accumulated biological wisdom on a viable way of living. In their book, *Extinction*, Paul and Anne Ehrlich are justifiably concerned at the disappearance of unique genomes, which, once gone, cannot be recovered. Life on Earth is dangerously reliant on only a few species of food plants and many others may die out through destruction of their habitats. We do not know what organisms or which of their genes we may need in the future. We have inherited an immense library, which we are only just beginning to read. We regard the destruction of the Library of Alexandria by the Arabs and, in turn, the burning of the Arabic books by the Inquisition, with particular horror; they were not just wealth but an inheritance from our ancestors. Banks of genetic material, seed-banks, are being set up but none too soon, for we cannot yet record the base sequences

of the genomes of complete animals to store them in some computer memory, and even if we did so it would still not be easy to run off a few copies of the Dodo if we wanted them.

However, it is within sight that the whole of even the human genome could be read and recorded in the computer. It comprises about 10<sup>10</sup> bits – about eighty times the total contents of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The genome of a bacterium like *E. coli* is 6.8 x 10<sup>9</sup> bits, largely known, and that of the phage  $\phi$ X174 is 5,486 bases, 10<sup>4</sup> bits. One of the big surprises is that perhaps 90 per cent of the human genome is "household DNA", which does not give viable proteins when translated. Evolution is all very well for bacteria which reproduce every twenty minutes and where some thousands of characters can be selected for by the survival or not of individuals in a very large population. However, it becomes less credible that large mammals are effectively choosing, through natural selection, individual letters in the genetic message of 10<sup>9</sup> bits. The larger creatures must be operating with much larger components and choosing complete subsystems which have evolved elsewhere, or choosing how to control machinery with which they are provided but have not used. They must be working mostly in the higher reaches of their hierarchy of structures. "Redundant" DNA may be concerned in this.

Even the gonococcus did not itself evolve the penicillinase which enables it to survive in the face of antibiotic treatment. It acquired the complete gene as a plasmid from another bacterium which had been living in contact with moulds for immense periods. To counter such acquired resistance to antibiotics we will need to use all the tricks with which the evolution of a high intelligence and the transmission of acquired knowledge has provided us.

Higher up in the hierarchy from molecules to primates, Brian Leith discusses current theoretical inadequacies in neo-Darwinism. He is worried, for example, about the controversy between those who support the idea of a steady incremental evolution and those who prefer that of "punctuated equilibrium" now current among people who work at the level of fossils. We know now that biological structures (like individual protein molecules) are much more dynamic than was thought earlier. Mutations

are constantly being tried and, if the structure being tested is a good one, most mutations are rejected as bad or accepted as neutral, but the overall shape and active site of the protein remain unchanged. Through C. H. Waddington's concepts of "creodes" – paths in a mountainous topography of many dimensions, now quantified in catastrophe theory – we can accept that some species, like the horseshoe crab, remain trapped in pockets, stable against disturbances, while others, like ourselves, have passed down a river valley as it were, changing rapidly as we go. Leith also discusses the recent fuss among taxonomists, some of whom, working with data only on large-scale structures, have been classifying fossil-organisms which have evolved by variation and mutation of DNA no longer available for study.

On the sociological level we have Philip Kitcher's presentation of *The Case Against Creationism*. Kitcher explains the facts, although creationism is not concerned with facts, but is a reaction against the uncertainties of life and the complexities of thought and action, creationism may be more conducive to the survival of the social organism, which has adopted it than the harder, scientific alternative of finding out how Nature really works, since a more important factor in evolution may be cooperation and simultaneous action. It may be better to act decisively in the wrong direction than for us all to depart in different directions or to do nothing. If the creationists did not threaten other people's survival by allowing them less than the best understanding of scientific knowledge, we could leave them to be dealt with by time. Such anti-rational movements are themselves understandable when one considers how much of what science we know is neglected or misused in the conduct of political affairs. Even President Reagan has spoken in favour of creationism, so that unfortunately it is necessary to mount a campaign in favour of true science, which alone can guide us in what to do with our species and our planet. The great scientist Count Ostensleben (1582-1654) said "You don't know, my boy, with what little reason the world is governed." If our species is to survive we must muster evolution, and these books are all useful towards the end, if only to point out how little we yet know, especially about how the larger scale properties of nature result from the fine-grain structure now emerging into the light.

## Crossbred children

Robert Wells

RICHARD STONEMAN (Editor)

Daphne into Laurel: Translations of classical poetry from Chaucer to the present  
330pp. Duckworth. £24.  
0 7156 1646 3

"A mere modern wit can like nothing that is not modern, and a pedant nothing that is not Greek". Pope observed in the Preface to his translation of the *Iliad*. The translator, he said, "must hope to please but a few". Pope's observation is truer now than it was in his own time. As the classics have ceased to be familiar, so the reading of those translations which were once considered an essential part of the sum of English poetry has fallen away too; and the neglect has been compounded in this century by a general distaste for reading long poems. How many take Keats at his word and look into Chapman's Homer? *Daphne into Laurel* brings before us a continuous and largely forgotten tradition of classical translation running from a few lines of Virgil in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* to C. H. Sisson's free and faithful version, for modern London, of Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*. The need for such an anthology has been felt for a long time.

Richard Stoneman claims in his useful Introduction that "the history of English literature could almost be written in terms of the influence of the classics", and *Daphne into Laurel* provides frequent evidence of how English poetry has been sustained by the practice of translation. This appears first in matters of diction and technique. Since the question of what to say is already settled by the original, the translator confronts peculiarly directly the question of poetic means. Blank verse was invented by Surrey for his version of the second and fourth books of the *Aeneid*. Without the various versions of Pindar, the *Odes* of Collins and Wordsworth's "Imitations of Immortality" could not exist. And many such instances could be given.

The imaginative debt is also

indicated. The sway of Golding's version of the *Metamorphoses* over Shakespeare appears not simply in verbal echoes, but in a constant preoccupation with mysterious transformation. George Sandys's version, published sixty years after Golding's, was among Keats's favourite readings, affecting the movement of his verse and giving him, among other details, the lowering him at the altar in "Ode on a Grecian Urn". Sandys's version has a particular claim to fame. The last eight books, translated while he was Treasurer of the Virginia Company at Jamestown, seem to be the first piece of extended poetic writing in English to come from America. Sandys said of his poem that it was "a double stranger, sprung from the stock of the ancient Romans, but bred in the New World, of the rudeness whereof it cannot but participate". Ovid's account of the Mediterranean dream-time, of fluid natural forms and places still to be named, is entered and changed by the landscapes of the American wilderness.

As *Daphne into Laurel* acknowledges by its title, translation means transformation. A good translation stands on its own, a new-made thing, and not in a state of slavish – Dr Johnson's word – dependence. One must not quarrel with the fact that a transformation has taken place. All one can do is observe and judge it. The translator is faced at every point by choices: the initial technical choices which determine the cast of the whole work and, following from these, the choices that are made word by word and sentence by sentence. The translator enters the work through these choices. The essential thing is that they should be consistent and create a tone. What emerges from Stoneman's exhibits, which run the gamut from literal closeness to loose imitation, is that the tone can never be exactly that of the original. It may be close, or it may, with a result that is equally successful in its own terms, be very distant. A translator is also a poet – Novallis called him "the poet of poetry". What can a poet do but speak in his own voice? Ben Jonson's masterly version of Horace's ode to Venus – the poet in middle age begging the goddess not to torment him – takes few freedoms, and yet the voice is Jonson's through and through. One of

the pleasures of reading translation is that it is possible to watch with unmatched intimacy how a particular poet's mind works, because one can know as one cannot with an original poem the point from which the poet begins. Perhaps the best way of understanding the range of possibility is to think of the translator and the author translated as the parents and the translation as the child. The characteristics of both parents will be present in an unaccountable combination but it may be possible to say that in this or that respect the child takes after one parent rather than the other.

*Daphne into Laurel* contains a scattering of obvious mistakes. A line from a passage by Chaucer is

missing. Two lines in a fine version by Bunting of Horace's "Eheu fugaces" are printed as one. The brief passages of informative and common which introduce each translator tend to be random and are sometimes plain wrong. This habit of inaccuracy makes it difficult to trust the book on other occasions, particularly where a translation has its vagaries – one comes upon something puzzling or contorted in the verse. A deeper fault is that the book is much too short. Lyric and epigram are served well enough, but say that in this or that respect the child takes after one parent rather than the other.

The carelessness and the often

## Polite no longer

Imre Salusinszky

HOWARD D. WEINBRÖT

Alexander Pope and the Traditions of Formal Verse Satire  
388pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press. £26.  
0 691 06344 3

According to F. R. Leavis in *Revolutions*, Pope's critical portrait of Addison in the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* is polite, urbane, free of personal malice. In contrast, the portrait of Horace a little later in the poem betrays "an indulgence in personal feeling, the effect depending upon a rejection of all the demands of politeness and social discretion". The aim of Howard Weinbröt's elegant book is to trace this apparent dissociation back to Classical sources, and to Pope's conscious modulation of the opening modes of Horace and Juvenal. Pope is indeed "Something like Horace", but Weinbröt's polemical message is that he is also, and more than is generally assumed, something like Juvenal and Persius.

In this argument, the crucial years are the 1730s, when Pope becomes increasingly committed to the opposition to Walpole, and increas-

ingly subject to attacks – upon his dignity, family and masculinity – by administration hacks. As the political outlook grows hopeless, Pope loses faith in the reformative and restorative powers of verse: the muted, logical, optimistic strains of Horace yield to the tragic, isolated and confronting tones of Juvenal. The assumption behind the *Epistles to Several Persons* is of a world that may still be saved through "sober advice"; *Arbuthnot*, addressed to an important citizen of a faded dynasty, questions that assumption; in the *Epistle to the Satires* it has given way to overwhelming gloom, as "Nothing is Sacred now but Villany".

There are several aspects of Weinbröt's study which will not appeal to more contemporary critical taste. One of these is the benign view he holds of poetic influence, with Pope calmly taking from Cicero, with Pope whatever suits his immediate purpose. Another is the insistent reduction of poetic reference to historical specificity. Pope's brilliant declaration, in the *Epistle to Fortescue*, that he will "Bare the mean Heart that lurks beneath a Star", is seen not as a generalized reference to corruption in high places, but as a specific shot at the personal stellar emblem of Sir Robert Walpole.

As a work of specialized scholarship, the book provides abundant

information on Pope's influence, and the controversies which arose, but constantly around him, and the influence he exercised. Later in the eighteenth century, Pope's influence is shown to have lost its hold on the modulating instrument: where he could convince or lash at will, they could only plead or sulk.

Two recent additions to *Grainville Archaeological Sites* paperback series are *Epidauros* by R. A. Tomlin (1982) pp. £6.95. 0 246 11398 7 and *Armerina* by R. J. A. Wilson (1982) pp. £6.95. 0 246 11396 0. The series is a re-examination in detail of the archaeological sites in the light of recent scholarship and excavation, and to set them in their archaeological and historical context. Part One of *Epidauros* outlines the history of the sanctuary and the myth and cult. Part Two looks in detail at the Temple of Apollo, including the Temple of Thymele, the Abaton, the Karyatid Porch and the Stadium. In *Armerina* R. J. A. Wilson examines this noted late-Roman villa and its mosaics under three headings: "Mosaics and Mosaicists", "Mosaics and Mosaicists", and "Context and Ownership". The volume contains plans and black and white photographs, together with notes, bibliography and index.

## Above the uplands

Redmond O'Hanlon

JOHN BUXTON (Editor)

The Birds of Wiltshire  
310pp. Trowbridge: Wiltshire Library and Museum Service. £5.50.  
0 90680 6

There is a special pleasure to be had in sustained reading of natural histories of the English counties. A medieval sense of place gradually overtakes one, and the sort confined to his lord's estate and unable to walk where he will beyond its perimeter, we begin to look with envy at the freely travelling bird, and the more exotic and unexpected they bring with them. Like the *Toss at Fintona* Ash, we are reminded, on the Wiltshire, by "strange birds from behind the North Pole . . . gaunt special creatures".

Whether or not they are driven by the white plumes of snow cloud, in the heart of a wind which smells of heather, arctic winds, and white birds do appear. Arctic (regularly), the Arctic skua (rarely), the Iceland gull (in 1973), the white gull (1945), the Lapland longspur (1953) and the Snow Bunting (this century). I well remember when I was at school, the Northern Diver, which came in with a white country-side

obliterated by weeks of snow, on the winding, glistening, half-frozen, river-like black strip of the Old Bath Road, outside the school, but a step from the iron gates of our enclosure; and we regarded his long sleek head, his small untelling eye and his great bill (which appeared above the apple box provided for his comfort) with a silent awe. It is some relief, all these years later, to have the size of one's reaction officially approved – because its appearance and, after convalescence, his departure, via a successful take-off from Wilton Water, are commemorated in this very book.

But, for the old, slow man with his horse and cart who must have been one of the last day-labourers left in Wiltshire, and who, when I was a child, used to come past our house every morning on his way to the farm by the sand-pits near Calne, the gulls were enough. "When them white birds are about", he would tell me, "the sea's flooded out".

But very few people can know this feeling better than John Buxton. As Emeritus Fellow of New College, and Reader in English Literature at Oxford until 1979, the best-known of his books is probably *Elizabethan Task* (1963); but he is best known to me as certainly the author of *Skomer* (1950) which he wrote with his brother-in-law, R.M. Lockley, and his brilliant monograph in the Collins New Naturalist series on *The Redstart* (1950). Taken prisoner by the Germans at the very beginning of the war on a Commando raid into

Norway, Buxton's concentrated behavioural studies began in April 1941.

snow was falling, as it had been for the past three days, when the first cock redstart came into the patch which we euphemistically called "the lower garden", and perched on the high retaining wall of the Palace, our prison. Since this wall (which was inscribed with the name HIERONYMUS) was nearly vertical and was facing away from the wind, no snow clung there, and the redstart perhaps found some insects sheltering in its crannies.

Buxton was joined behind the wall by George Waterston, who worked on the wrinkle, and by Peter Conder, the future Director of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, whose ornithological career began under their tutelage. "The Redstart in Wiltshire, mindful of Buxton's past attention and well-built nest boxes, still enjoys studying the odd behaviour patterns of soldiers: in spite of continuing changes in the habitat and disturbance by military activities, one or two pairs still breed in 'Imber' village. (This demonstrates remarkable fidelity by the species to a particular site.)" And Geoffrey Webber's excellent notes also tell us that Buxton's other love, judging by the number of learned papers he has lavished upon it, the Oystercatcher, which paid only two recorded visits to Wiltshire in the last 150 years, has now

taken to dropping in (twenty recent calls) on an old friend.

There is a delightfully strong sense of an oral tradition in this scholarly book, of news passing from parish to parish across the chalk and the cheese country, of the large interest of small events: in 1916, old so-and-so's dog kills a week-old curlew chick near Tidworth (the first breeding record); at Sutton Benger, in 1849 someone almost threw away Wiltshire's only Wilson's petrel (died on holiday from the waves); thinking it to be a swift; the last Great Bustard (once *de rigueur* at the inaugural feast of the Mayors of Salisbury) was ridden down near Broad Hinton in 1806 (and, we used to be told, by an innocent visiting American whose local hosts invited him, as he was going riding anyway, and it would not be too much trouble to bring back a bustard for lunch); the roding of the woodcock is seen at Ashley Copse; Collingbourne 1828 ("or '29"): a white-tailed eagle roosts over-night on the spire of Salisbury Cathedral; in 1878 two eggs of the Peregrine falcon are removed from a gutter on the tower and, in 1816 two young were hatched and were taken. One was purchased by Col. R. Meinhartshagen and the other by the Hon. Gerald Lascelles.

There are fewer barn-owls, long-eared owls and red-backed shrikes, but more dippers, great-crested grebes and buzzards. The alien little owl and the collared dove colonize the county, and for lack of decent housing on the open

downs the stock dove moves in to army target vehicles. But the merlin still hunts across the Plain in winter, and the hobby still breeds there in the summer.

There are fine articles on Wiltshire ornithologists by Ruth Barnes ("John Legg led a secluded life and died young. *The History of British Birds* which he claims to have written was never published and has never been found"); on the geography and geology of the downs, the open waters (all marshes), the rivers, and the marshy areas of the Pewsey Vale, by Beatrice Gillam; on the woodlands (Hamptworth Common, Savernake Forest, Spye Park) by David Rice; and on ornithological discussions of the Cotswold Water Park, the Bristol Avon, Salisbury Plain (including a description of a Hen Harrier roost up to five of these great birds will come floating out of the dusk each evening and drop into an olive/leaf small and unspectacular patch of long grass), the Salisbury Avon, and the Vale of Wardour, by Geoffrey Snowball, John Buxton, John Goyett, Martin Peers and Jack Major.

Photographs of typical habitats, distribution maps of all the breeding species, an index and a bibliography which includes the Bowwood Estate Game Books, the Longford Castle Game Books, and the "Notes by Rev. George March" in his interesting copy of *The History of British Birds*, in the British Museum (Natural History), at Tring, complete this exemplary guide.

APRIL 15 1983



## Feeding the free mind

Erik de Mauny

GERALD MANSELL

Let Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting  
300pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.  
£16.50.  
0 297 78158 8

To most people who have spent any time there, to work for the BBC is not simply a job but a vocation; and if this accurately reflects the atmosphere in the Corporation as a whole, it is especially true of the BBC External Services, that unofficial League of Nations occupying Bush House in the Strand. Gerard Mansell was Managing Director of the External Services for nine years until his retirement in 1980, so he is admirably placed to tell the full story, which he has done not only by making a careful scrutiny of the vast mass of documentation available, but by consulting many of the leading figures who have helped to give the BBC's overseas broadcasts their distinctive shape and unmistakable authority. But above all, his book is a celebration of a particular *esprit de corps*, in times good and bad, in a part of the Corporation more vulnerable than most to the vagaries, vacillations and demands for economy of successive British Governments.

The present World Service of the BBC had its beginnings in the development of short-wave radio in the 1920s, and the launching in 1932, under Sir John Reith as Director-General, of the Empire Service. This had been Reith's idea, but he had to fight for five years to bring it about, and without his foresight and granite determination, it might have been much further delayed: there were not only technical difficulties and lack of adequate finance, but timidity and misgivings in many high quarters. It was not until six years later, in 1938, that the Corporation entered the field of foreign-language broadcasts, with the inauguration of the Arabic and Latin American Services. In the preceding months, to counter the increasing propaganda of the Fascist dictatorships, the Foreign Office had given thought to starting its own foreign-language broadcasts. It was by

the power of his personality and his tactical skill that Reith persuaded the Government that the BBC was far better suited to carry out that task. He thus preserved the BBC's independence, and at the same time laid down certain guide-lines: that the Corporation must always speak with one voice, in its broadcasts at home and abroad, and that it must always present news of world developments truthfully, impartially and objectively, even when certain developments might run contrary to the national interest. Those principles remain valid today, even though at times they are not notably during the Soviet operation the Corporation has come under severe government pressure to modify its attitude.

Mr Mansell devotes several chapters to the BBC's role in the Second World War, and vividly conveys the drama surrounding it. This was, indeed, the Corporation's finest hour, and one which saw a rapid and vast expansion of its foreign-language broadcasts, aimed simultaneously at confounding the enemy, bringing hope and comfort to the peoples of Occupied Europe, and persuading the uncommitted countries of the justice of Britain's cause. By the time the war in Europe ended, it was putting out more than 850 hours a week in forty-five languages.

It is self-evident that any broadcasting organization is only as good as the people who run it, and Mansell's narrative is studiously and neatly etched portraits of some of the more brilliant exponents of the art: men like Sir John Beresford Clark, Sir Ian Jacob, Noel Newsome, Darsie Gillie, J. A. Canacho, Sir Hugh Greene and R. E. Gregson, to name only a few. They sometimes had their problems inside the Corporation, but the major threat invariably came from outside, from that "death by a thousand cuts" by which successive governments have regularly crowded the External Services. It is symptomatic of official penny-pinching that in 1981 the present Conservative Government decided that the Spanish, Italian and Maltese Services must be dropped. Less than a year later, the Falklands conflict with the Spanish-speaking Argentine erupted.

From the government side, there has been a persisting heresy (the word is not too strong) that Britain need not

broadcast to her friends, only to her enemies. Yet, time and again, crises have broken out where least expected, and where Britain's voice was most needed. It is eloquent proof of the sound foundations laid by Reith that the BBC should have emerged from so many crises with its authority undimmed: from Suez, from the bitter polemics of the Cold War, from Rhodesian UDI and from the recent Falklands episode. Yet, as Mansell shows, successive official reports have been more concerned to hamstring the External Services than to help them in their task.

The BBC's mission to present the news truthfully and impartially has not, of course, endeared it to all its listeners. It has, for example, regularly come under attack from the Soviet Union, as may be shown by a brief extract from *Azovskomolnyy Pravda*. "White" propaganda is straightforward propaganda. It is waged by the enemies of communism quite openly, even though under the mantle of "impartiality" and "objectivity". But this does not lessen its hostile nature. With that kind of back-handed compliment, the BBC may feel reasonably satisfied with itself. In fact, Moscow Radio paid it a more open one only a year or so ago, by inaugurating its own "World Service", its format closely modelled on that of the BBC.

There is one reproach (apart from a few minor misprints) to which Mansell lays himself open, and that is of a certain imbalance. In other words, he has devoted some nine-tenths of his book to the first thirty years of the External Services, so that the events of the past two decades are mainly crowded into a final chapter. It is true that he does touch on the recurring problems of broadcasting to the Communist countries. Yet the saga of the BBC's dealings with Moscow and other East European capitals could well have furnished a complete chapter of its own. Perhaps one day it will form the subject of a separate study. On the other hand, after so many instances of government parsimony, one can only give a staunch endorsement to Mr Mansell's closing sentences:

The conclusion, that there has somehow to be an end to the repeated questioning and uncertainty... is inescapable. This is a matter for government. A few years ago a distinguished American foreign correspondent coined a phrase to describe the role which the External Services have come to play. They are to the free mind, he said, what Oxfam is to the hungry. It was a description which was liked at Bush House. It seemed to say it all.

## Far from downhearted

Paul Smith

JILL DROWER

Good Clean Fun: The story of Britain's first holiday camp  
63pp. Arcadia Books. £5.95.  
0 9508344 0 8

Hard on the heels of Billy Butlin's autobiography comes this attractively produced assertion, by his great-granddaughter, of Joseph Cunningham's claim to be regarded as the originator of the holiday camp, a generation before Butlin entered the field. After losing his job as superintendent of a ladies' institute in Tooty, Cunningham made a flourishing business out of the summer camps and his wife had been running for the boys. The International Young Men's Holiday Camp established on the Isle of Man in 1895 was the 1930s accommodating some 50,000 visitors a year and making an average annual profit of £27,000 with its two-guinea-a-week holidays.

The ingredients were very much those Butlin was to employ, a informality and fun with the sort of communal amenities that only expensive hotels could rival, something less apart than ordinary camping ("no roughing it" insisted one of Cunningham's early ad-

## Losing streak

José Harris

KEITH ROBBINS

The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1975  
408pp. Longman. £14.95 (paperback, £7.50).  
0 582 48971 7

This book concludes with the confession that its title is "not self-evidently appropriate" - an admission that confirmed my mounting suspicion over the previous three hundred and forty-two pages that the author had never really made up his mind what he was trying to say. The writing of "recent history", of "total history", and of readable textbooks are of course all notoriously difficult; and it may well be that in trying to do all three simultaneously Keith Robbins has set himself an impossible task. One major problem is that the sheer volume of recorded historical facts since 1870 is so vast that no book which attempts to survey them comprehensively can ever be more than hopelessly superficial. Another is that there is no necessary congruity in the time-structures appropriate to different spheres of history: thus 1901, 1931 and 1956, which Professor Robbins identifies as major turning-points, may make sense in the context of foreign policy and economics, but they have no special significance in religion, sport, culture and the history of ideas. Another problem is that explaining the rise and fall of empires is a theme so complex as to be virtually outside the scope of positivist history. Even Gibbon ultimately reached the melancholy conclusion that he had started at the wrong point. All these problems are compounded by the fact that, as Robbins modestly admits, he has no offer of a particularly interesting study of the past hundred years of British history. The empire was gained and lost, but "it is still not clear why it happened". "Eclipse of a great power" is carefully logged, but nowhere adequately explained.

In spite of these shortcomings this is not a book without value. There are certain topics - such as foreign policy, religion, and the presence or absence of national identity, on which Robbins writes very well indeed. His analysis of the ebb and flow of Britain's relationship with Europe is at all points lucid and convincing. Scots, Welsh and Irish questions are rescued from the twilight and given their proper status in a book about the history of "Britain". Twentieth-century Christianity - "full of confused life rather than moribund" - receives the serious treatment it deserves, though as a subject in its own

right rather than as a factor which explains Britain's secular decline. There are some interesting studies about footballers, though even a soccer-phobe like myself finds it hard to see how they can be blamed for Britain's loss of global power (unless an echo of bread and circuses). It is worthy of note that religion in Britain still outstrips football as an active spectator sport - attendance at football matches, even in that latter's peak year of popularity.

Other themes are handled much less satisfactorily. Robbins acknowledges the "poverty" of his discussion of the history of science, and indeed cites his own ignorance in this field as evidence for the existence of "two cultures". But his breathless, unrelenting, and inadequate - in fact made worse by a series of desperate and glibly punned ("Hair was one of the first things to let down"; "to be summoned by Beitman... is to be presented with a varied feast"). There is frequent mention of the reorganization and reform of government, but no explanation of how government actually worked when it was not being reformed. Wider social themes such as demographic change, family structure, social mobility and relationships between the sexes are virtually if not wholly ignored. The erection and demolition of the Cottesloe road predictably appear as reified symbols of English class divisions - though the most interesting aspect of those walls, which is that the solid Georgian dwellings on the council side were much more attractive than the ugly pebble-dashed semis on the private estate. Transient reference is made to Oxford philosophy, high culture, Nobel prizewinners and immigrant Jewish intellectuals; but if anyone had an original thought in Britain between 1870 and 1975 it cannot be found in this book. No attempt is made to assess the tendentious, unsound, but intensely challenging general interpretation of modern British history advanced in recent years by Keith Middlemas and Martin Wiener.

Such omissions are perhaps inevitable in a work of such ambitious scope, but they do tend to undermine its value as an advanced textbook and compendium of recent scholarly debate. At the risk of sounding old-fashioned I found myself wishing that Professor Robbins had resisted the bear-hug of total history and concentrated on a more limited analysis of internal and external politics. In these areas his scholarship is superb, his judgment impressively fair-minded, his insight often profound.

closer analysis. He seems to have relied largely on the low capital cost of the accommodation he provided. Not only was his bell-tens cheap, but as they were not permanent structures most of them were treated for ratting purposes as agricultural land. This enabled him to provide public amenities of a standard his clients could not normally have afforded, and to take his wife on winter cruises in their steam yacht on the proceeds. It would be interesting to know more about the customers. Many of them are said to have come from industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire. The social range seems to have been wide. A camper in 1936 found himself living with a Government official, a clerk, a shipyard worker and a University man. The photographs and the satisfied client who, basking in the "delicious" of that delectable home, Bohemianism, "voted 'the old Camp' to be 'fiscle' princeps", suggest a white-collar as much as the working worker. What had begun as a holiday among the boys of the Liverpool area ended in a commercial enterprise necessarily geared to those well above the poverty line. They took to it, "Mayer's Greenhouse" relishing it, "Mayer's Greenhouse" "The Nomads", "Farmyard Swallow" posing with posters, watch-photos, and stiff collars in front of their tent, and tractable people with a capacity for enjoying themselves together not eroded by the dead weight of conventional durables and the soporific screen

ART

GERALD CHAFFLE and HANS H. SCHULTZ (Editors)

The Turn of the Century: German Literature and Art, 1890-1915  
300pp. 18 black-and-white plates.  
Sonn: Bouvier. DM 138.

What is the distinctively German contribution to European art and literature at the turn of the century? The answer suggested by this volume is that it was inwardness: the poet living in an "age of prose" turned away from reality to explore the "spiritual condition of man" (as Erich Heller says in an introductory paper on Rilke). What he found there was not only, but anxiety and dread - what William J. Brazil, in his summing-up of the whole symposium, calls "the experience of terror in the face of nothingness". The artistic and indeed existential imperative was to create meaning where none was socially given, since the traditional cultural consensus had broken down.

This collection of twenty-five papers by different hands shows how rich and diverse was the response: the sexual psychology of Freud and Weininger, the aesthetics of Woringer and Kandinsky, the romantic spiritualism of Meister Eckhart and Karl May (which the young Hitler so greatly admired), the painting and poetry of Kokoschka, Rilke and Trakl, the various artistic developments from the Berlin and Vienna Secession through Arts and Crafts to Art and Dada, the sceptical vision of Viennese writers and critics like Schmitzler, Musil, Kraus, Loos and Wittgenstein, the theatre of Max Reinhardt and the cabaret which flourished in the Munich of Wedekind and Thomas Mann. From this range of subjects, viewed from a variety of angles, a certain consensus emerges. The tradition from the old century to the new was conceived in Germany in terms not of continuity and renewal, but of radical disjunction with epistemic undertones.

This book illustrates the value of an interdisciplinary approach to literature and the visual arts. The interaction between different art forms is the subject of several of the most suggestive papers: the influence of Wagner's music on Kokoschka's visual symbolism (analysed by Donald E. Graham), the links between Kandinsky, Trakl and Arp (by Christina Lutz and Harriet Watts), the affinities between "verbalizations" of Paul Klee's visual motifs (Harriet Lutz), and a Dada poem (according to Friedrich Lach) comes into existence as a result of "free artistic play" with existing literary models. That is lacking is a clear recognition that even the most self-absorbed artist like the Dadaists were living of the First World War). Heller's approach to Rilke sets the scene. It is true that during the 1890s German writers moved away from the preoccupation with society which had characterized Naturalism. But inwardness itself was socially conditioned, and it is misleading to speak of alienation and dread as if they were purely existential categories. They also arose as a response to social oppression.

William Brazil gives us a glimpse of the social pressures which contributed to the turn of inwardness. A society still in the grip of a reactionary ruling class was at the same time committed to the promises of industrial modernization. But this is lacking is a more specific account of how this contradiction played out on individual sensibilities: through authoritarian families and rigid social roles, through the standardized schools and universities, through compulsory military service, through bureaucratic routine and the

## The cult of inwardness

Edward Timms

treadmill of journalism. The accounts we have of German schools in this period are particularly harrowing: from the Prussianized grammar-schools described by Thomas Mann and Georg Heym to the Austrian military academies of Rilke and Musil. The patriarchal family leaves an equally indelible imprint, from the case histories of Freud through to Kafka and the Expressionists. When we take full measure of these factors, and of the way they shape artistic discourse, the aesthetics of inwardness emerge as a displaced form of social protest.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the representation of sexuality. Why did sexual themes loom so large in German art and writing around 1900? This question is raised in a particularly challenging paper on Freud and the "Quarrel over Bisexuality" (by Peter Heller). The answer suggested is that this preoccupation with sex had Judaic sources, in the concept of circumcision as a "compact between man and God" which treats the sexual as "symbolic territory". Peter Heller suggests that this "symbolic" view of sex became extended to more general social relations in this period. Sex became a symbol for relations of subjection and domination, or a means of allaying social anxiety. For a generation uncertain of its identity in a rapidly changing society, Freud's theories offered an escape into a sexualized "inner domain".

These suggestive but rather abstract hypotheses leave the fundamental question unresolved. Perhaps it can only be answered by a more comparative and rigorously historical approach. Why was sexuality such an obsessive theme in Germany and Austria, while in this same period it scarcely surfaces in public discourse in England? Reading letters and memoirs of the Edwardian period, one is left with the impression that the English middle-class intellectuals lived in a sexually neutralized atmosphere. Habituation to all-male company, at public school or Oxbridge, in the professions and the London clubs, created a social and emotional decorum in which the female sex was deliberately invisible. Of course, there were homosexual undercurrents. But the punitive legislation of the period, and particularly the moralistic reaction after Oscar Wilde's trial, ensured that they remained beneath the surface.

In Germany and Austria, by contrast, sexuality belonged to the public domain. Memoirs of the period recall the army of prostitutes, almost as numerous as the soldiers themselves, who paraded the streets of German cities and Austrian garrison towns. And the discourse of average-class writers and artists was dominated by images of sexual conflict: Wedekind's elemental antagonism between Lulu and Jack the Ripper, Weininger's insistence on Male and Female as incompatible principles, Kokoschka's image of love as war-to-the-death (in his plays) or at best an uneasy truce (in his pictures), Heinrich Mann's "Blue Angel" wreaking vengeance on society, Kluge's *Femmes fatales* and the threateningly erotic walls portrayed by Schiele, the links between sadism and sexuality in Musil's stories, Hofmannsthal's hysterical Elektra and the diseased eroticism of Thomas Mann's *Aschenbach*, Kraus's portrayal of the prostitute as the great adversary of male morality and Schmitzler's insistence on the affinity between love and death. Freud was truly the presiding genius of this generation, with his image of sexual relations governed by penis envy on the one hand and castration anxiety on the other. Sexuality is pictured not just as a "symbolic field", but as a field of combat. What is lacking is any sense of tenderness in relationships between the sexes. Even Rilke's quest is for a release from sexuality, like an arrow released from a bow. The only author who finds words for tenderness is (perhaps significantly) a woman, Else Lasker-Schüler.

What social factors shaped these images of sexual warfare? One answer must lie with the easy availability of prostitutes. Since emotional relationships were so constrained within the bourgeois class, sensitive young men found their first sexual experiences in the arms of whores. This helps to

explain the blend of irresistible fascination and horrified dread with which sexuality is invested by Weininger and Kafka, Trakl and Schiele. These anxieties were heightened by the knowledge that certain forms of venereal disease might lead to paralysis and imbecility. And in the background lurked the myths associated with Nietzsche, which suggested that heightened mental states might only be obtained at the price of disease and insanity.

The existential dread with which certain writers invest sexuality thus has all-too-human sources. But this does not fully explain the pervasive sense of female sexuality as a threat to male identity. The contest for this symbolic

territory has political and ideological overtones. The concept of "masculinity" invoked by many avant-garde writers seems to have been profoundly shaped by the Wilhelmian ethos which they claimed to despise. The cult of "male" intellectual rigour and self-discipline was a displacement of prevailing concepts of virility on to a cultural plane. Political conflicts were being fought out in terms of sexual distinctions. One of the few critical campaigns which shook the authority of Kaiser Wilhelm II was the revelation that homosexual practices were widespread among members of his entourage. The charge of bisexuality undermined an ideological order in which males were securely on top and

submissive females were supposed to lie back and think of new recruits for the Kaiser's army. The daring raids made into sexual territory by German writers and artists of this period paradoxically served to reinforce the prevailing assumptions about virility. It is important to relate the writing of this period to the imperial ethos which it obliquely reflects (Thomas Mann's hero was Frederick the Great).

It is also important to take account of an emergent generation of women writers who were beginning to question the patriarchal order: it is extraordinary that the volume under review should make no reference to the women writers who became prominent in Germany at the turn of the century: Bertha von Suttner, Lily Braun, Gabriele Reuter, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Else Lasker-Schüler.

The dominating presence in German public life was of course the Kaiser. This is rightly emphasized by two contributions to this volume which are historically more firmly grounded. Gisela Brude-Firmau analyses the rhetoric of the Kaiser's public speeches, showing how potentially he blended nationalism with religiosity. And Marion F. Deshmukh, writing on "Art and Politics in Berlin", shows how heavily the Kaiser's shadow fell on other fields of cultural expression. These two papers actually underline the notion propounded elsewhere that the artists of this generation withdrew into a realm of "inwardness". Their art (for all Kandinsky's pronouncements) did not form an "autonomous realm", but was inextricably entangled with contemporary life. This became clear to everyone after August 1914, when with few exceptions the aesthetes of the 1890s contributed poems in praise of the war effort. For many of them the war seemed to be the fulfillment of their subjective vision - liberation from a stiflingly oppressive society or confirmation of their visions of incoherent chaos. It is misleading to conclude that the art of this generation was created "with no point of reference other than the self" (William Brazil). Their art reflects a society which systematically frustrated self-fulfilment.



An untitled gouache on paper by the French artist Robert Eugène Pougeon (1888-1953), which will be included in Christie's sale of Art Nouveau and Art Deco paintings, glass, ceramics and objets d'art at the Hôtel Richemond, Geneva on May 8.

## The unbookish Brotherhood

William Vaughan

QUENTIN BELL

A New and Noble School: The Pre-Raphaelites  
192pp. Macdonald. £10.95.  
0 356 085 46 5

For most twentieth-century commentators, the Pre-Raphaelite painters have posed a teaser. They lie on the fringes of aesthetic respectability. As a breakaway group that defied the official standards of their day they have their place in the history of the avant-garde. Yet their anecdotal and moralizing tendencies, and their naïvely literal naturalism, have little to do with the canons of the modern movement. Furthermore their present popular appeal seems to be closely connected to the sentimental taste for Victorianism that has increased as our own social and economic problems have become more intractable.

One outcome of this situation has been the nature of the literature produced on the Pre-Raphaelites. There have been some distinguished specialist studies; but far more common are the general picture books and gossip biographies. It is symptomatic of the unease felt about the aesthetic status of the Pre-Raphaelites that anecdotes should predominate over analysis in the accounts of them. The way that these are presented is revealing, too. Incidents that would be related with sympathy if they occurred in the life of a "great" artist are given the valdeville treatment if they happen to a Pre-Raphaelite. Biographers have written movingly about the poverty of Van Gogh. But few have been inclined to

express concern for Holman Hunt when he was short of cash. Quentin Bell describes him on one such occasion as being "on his uppers".

Despite this, Professor Bell does not use humour and narrative to mask the problems posed by the Pre-Raphaelites. He draws attention to the incompleteness of the scholarly record of their art and claims no more for his own book than that it is "a fairly unsystematic collection of things that seem to me worth saying about the Pre-Raphaelites". In saying this he does himself an injustice. He is far too accomplished a writer to present the public with a mere bran-tub miscellany of observations. In fact the book is well organized, covering in three broad chapters the origins of the Brotherhood, its early flowering, and the later movement that developed around Rossetti after the initial group had disbanded. But Bell's disclaimer does enable him to adopt a relaxed, engaging and witty form of discourse. It also encourages him to treat many of the common assertions about the Pre-Raphaelites with refreshing brevity. There is a serious purpose behind this. He wishes to see the Pre-Raphaelites first and foremost as painters. This involves him, in a dilemma. He comes (as he tells us) from a generation brought up to dismiss the Pre-Raphaelites as bad art. He has long since ceased to believe this. Yet he cannot wholly abandon the aesthetic tenets of his youth. He therefore seeks to account for this Pre-Raphaelite in terms of pure pictorial values.

In the course of this quest he gives short shrift to any claims that the art of the Pre-Raphaelites owes anything essential to the influence of critics and theorists. "Books, in studios", he comments, "are apt to be incorporated in still-lives, or they pop

up a table when one of its legs falls to reach the floor, and sometimes they are used for kindling fires." He therefore finds it unlikely that the writings of Ruskin were of crucial importance for them. Similarly he believes they owed remarkably little to the Nazarenes - that brotherhood of German artists who had emulated the values of medieval art decades earlier - since the pictorial styles of the two groups are dissimilar. He discovers a hero in Millais. Dismissing the view of this artist as a "kind of glorious ventriloquist's dummy, repeating, magnifying, embellishing the thoughts of others" he draws attention to the positive and original qualities of his masterful early paintings. Without the expertise of such a painter, he concludes, Pre-Raphaelitism would never have got off the ground.

It would be easy enough to present counter-arguments, to suggest ways in which Ruskin's influence was vital, demonstrate Pre-Raphaelite responses and reactions to the art of the Nazarenes, or claim that Millais was dependent upon the intellectual and imaginative stimulus provided by Hunt and Rossetti when achieving his greatest works. But to do so would, I think, be to take issue with symptoms rather than causes. The central point is that Professor Bell appears to believe that there is a world of pictorial practices that flourishes on its own, removed from the world of ideas. "Pictures are not made with ideas, they are made with paint", he proclaims. Much of what he has to say about the Pre-Raphaelites will stand or fall according to the extent to which the reader can accept such a division. For those who cannot his book will still have a lot to offer - not least, as a reminder of the problems involved in assessing the Pre-Raphaelites and as an exhortation not to avoid them.

## Long entanglement

Denis Judd

GROFFREY MOORHOUSE

India Britannica  
288pp. Harvill Press. £12.95.  
0 00 216662 3

The close British association with India lasted for nearly four hundred years. It had humble commercial origins, but in a little over two centuries the East India Company had become the paramount power, and by 1877 Queen Victoria had been proclaimed Queen-Emress. On February 28, 1948, the last British troops, the 1st Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry, left Indian soil and the most complex and long-standing of Britain's imperial entanglements came formally to an end.

Geoffrey Moorhouse has set himself the almost impossible task of describing this broad historical process, as well as briefly analysing both sides' post-imperial attitudes, in a mere 288 pages. The book is handsomely illustrated and well produced. It must also be said that Mr Moorhouse writes well, and as the author of a warmly-received book on Calcutta, with some authority.

Inevitably there are problems in a survey of this sort. A good deal is skated over, and there are inadequate explanations of several of the great episodes of Indian history. Much has also been omitted, including any mention in the text of at least two Viceroy - Lord Reading (who from 1922-26 seemed to have destroyed Gandhi's hold over the nationalist movement), and Lord Northbrook - Burma, and of the Indian Empire for

half a century, is mentioned on only four occasions.

On balance, though, the author should be congratulated more for what he has managed to include than criticized for what he has left out. He has produced a very readable and competent introduction to the history of British India, and one that is full of telling phrases. Thus General Dyer, perpetrator of the Amritsar massacre, is dismissed as "an illing old sweat, suffering from arteriosclerosis and the bronchial effects of chain-smoking". Kipling "in the exclusively Indian setting of his late adolescence" showed responses which "were strikingly those of a capable journalist, detached enough to be critical or sympathetic to rulers and ruled alike, but far less concerned with motive, than with symptoms and activity". Attlee was "a tough-minded, underrated man", etc.

Moorhouse is particularly perceptive when he evaluates the legacy of the relationship between Britain and India, remarking that when he first arrived in the sub-continent "in the midst of its strangeness and its towering scale of people and events, there was a haunting familiarity awaiting an Englishman there... My people had marked India to a degree that startled me, and India had marked us." Among the varied legacies of British rule is the eccentric splendour of Bombay railway station, the world's biggest cricket crowds, and a (just) recognizable Westminster-style of democracy. The British have absorbed nearly a thousand words from Indian languages, hundreds of thousands of sub-continental immigrants, and a host of imperial memories - fading tokens of a raj that surpassed all others in its scale and complexity.

UP 15 1983



# The light and the dark

Angela Leighton

MARGARET KIRKHAM

Jane Austen: *Feminism and Fiction*  
187pp. Brighton: Harvester. £18.95.  
0 7106 0468 7

P. J. M. SCOTT

Jane Austen: *A Reassessment*  
208pp. Vision. £11.95.  
0 8578 494 2

Each new book about Jane Austen makes its claim to be original against increasing odds. Yet originality is a mark of both of these new critical works. In different ways, Margaret Kirkham's *Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction* is a scholarly, readable and often adventurous interpretation of Austen's fiction. She argues that Jane Austen is neither a limited minimalist of social behaviour nor a reactionary conservative, but an Enlightenment feminist. She claims that Austen consciously aligns herself with a tradition of feminism which stresses the rational and moral equality of women, and that the anti-Romantic flavour of her novels derives from this allegiance. Her claim is supported by a long and detailed account of the development of feminism in the eighteenth century, its relation to the "mixed character" debate of Fielding and Richardson and its final articulation in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. "As a feminist moralist," she writes, "Jane Austen is in agreement with Wollstonecraft on so many points that it seems unlikely she had not read *Vindication*." Such an agreement is based on the common assumption of these two writers that women share the same moral nature as men, ought to share the same moral status, and exercise the same responsibility for their own conduct.

The book contains an interpretation of Jane Austen which is general enough to override niggling questions of proof about her reading, and contains documentary material that is interesting and informative in its own right. Having discussed at some length the historical importance of Enlightenment feminism, Margaret Kirkham gives a salutary critique of the early biographies of Austen, showing how their protestations of piety and respectability were deliberate strategies to dissociate her from the scandalous notoriety of Mary Wollstonecraft. Her analysis of individual novels then emphasises the moral independence of the heroines,

and dwells in particular on the influence of Kotzebue's Romantic dramas which provide the measure of Jane Austen's different ideals of moral responsibility and good sense. Austen's presentation of her heroines is in the tradition of Enlightenment feminism because it seeks to match in them intelligence and feeling, and makes women the central moral agents of the works.

Such an approach to Austen's novels is persuasive, but also, at times, familiar. It could be argued that Kirkham has brought the new name of Enlightenment feminism to a rather old interpretation of the novels as finely-balanced and highly moral. On the few occasions when she risks a more playful, textual criticism, her remarks are intriguing but a little forced. She suggests, for instance, that there might be a connection between Fanny Price's surname and a passage in Wollstonecraft's *Maria* where "the heroine's husband says 'that every woman had her price'"; and elsewhere she links the title of *Mansfield Park* to a famous slavery case, claiming that Fanny's "moral status in England is implicitly contrasted yet also compared with that of the Antiguan slaves". However, in general the interest and value of this book lie in its more temperate, historical documentation, and in its interpretation of Jane Austen's feminism as an informing moral consciousness rather than a private literary allusion.

P. J. M. Scott's *Jane Austen: A Reassessment* opens with the promise to be "a reading of Austen's work which is different from those hitherto expounded - sometimes drastically different". This different reading broadly presents Jane Austen as a writer who looks upon the dark side of human character and human society, and whose view of the world is disaffected, pessimistic and savage. According to Scott, these novels are "continuous *exposés* of the world as a theatre of myopic egotists". The delightfulness of the heroines merely serves as a foil to this pervading social malaise. Thus *Northanger Abbey* is redolent of a suppressed disenchantment with everything, and *Emma* "is essentially a nasty book", and its snobbish, meddling heroine a villain who escapes even Jane Austen's censure. "Maybe," Scott speculates, "it was a bank holiday trip for her very intelligence, a sort of ethical blow-out."

This emphasis on the dark side of Jane Austen's fiction is conveyed with the intensity of a personal crusade, and the book as a whole is curiously and

unashamedly personal. The author misses no opportunity to confide his own opinions and experiences to the reader. His avowed anti-biographical approach to Jane Austen, on the grounds that critics habitually "fashion themselves with a whole tangle of obfuscating material which obscures rather than leading into the works' finest intuitions", clearly does not apply to his own work, which is heavy with the life and beliefs of its author. He tells us, for instance, about his father's and mother's differing responses to social rudeness, and his own which is to "give a sickly grin and limp away". He disabuses Freud of his theory that children are incapable of jokes by referring to "the 4-, 5- and 6-year-olds I have known", and establishes his personal acquaintance with the elder Musgroves of *Persuasion* when he declares that "there can be little meeting of minds when one talks to them". As a general reflection on Jane Austen he advises the reader to "Think of the beatific gentleness, the delicacy of a light that never was on sea or land, the heart-broken, heart-breaking gratitude and the cool, calm, relaxed quite unselfconscious ferocity which alternates through the *Magnificent*; or through the sayings and life of its speaker's Son. Scott's insatiable wish to ask about other things certainly ensures that Jane Austen herself remains shadowy and anonymous by comparison.

It is difficult, given the constant interruptions and digressions, to recapture the precise nature of Scott's Reassessment. His argument tends either to be broken by personal confidences and tangential meditations, or else obscured by a mercilessly gymnastic style. He writes, for instance, that in *Northanger Abbey*

Austen is not evolving a profound, or even fairly interesting, fable on the theme of the gap between the worlds of art and the life outside them, eg the real dangers inherent in too much reliance on the imaginative faculty (? *The Tempest*), the megalomaniac tendency latent in artistry (Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*), art as constituting consciousness in its most valuable aspects (Proust) or any other theme of remotely equivalent import.

A book on Jane Austen for the Critical Studies Series cannot, I think, cater for the sheer breadth of Scott's preoccupations. Altogether, this book rides from ostentation to inconsequence with an abandon which is all the author's own, but which completely eludes the reader's more particular needs.

## Sisters and the cloth

Ruth McCurry

SARA MAITLAND

A Map of the New Country: Women and Christianity  
218pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.  
£9.95 (paperback, £4.95).  
0 7100 9326 8

Feminism and Christianity have long lived side by side and many women have found themselves deeply involved in both; in the United States there have been several attempts to bring the two together and to see what their proponents have to say to each other. But it has been only recently that this discussion has been opened up in Britain, by the publication in 1981 of Susan Dowell and Linda Hurcombe's *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve*, now unfortunately out of print. Sara Maitland's new book is just the successor that was needed - it is fuller, and weightier; she has had more opportunities for thorough research on both sides of the Atlantic, and she has been able to cover more and different areas.

In a disarmingly personal preface Sara Maitland establishes her feminist credentials; she then proceeds to a businesslike survey of the history of women and the Church - its ideas on, and practice of, ministry, the position of nuns, the issue of women's ordination, the Churches' bureaucracies

and religious language and spirituality - which is impressive in its scale and its interdisciplinary competence. She does not attempt, as her predecessors did, to apply Christian insights to feminism in return.

The Church has tragically lost much wisdom by undervaluing the contribution that women can make to its beliefs and preaching; the reason for this is explored in the first chapter:

There now seems to be an emerging consensus that the root of the problem is a very ancient Christian heresy, Dualism... means splitting the wholeness of God's creation into divisions labelled "good" and "bad". Feminist theology perceives that dualistic splits are the cause, not just of sexism, but of racism, classism and ecological destruction.

This idea is well worked out throughout a book which in itself is an attempt to overcome the dualistic division between a woman's beliefs as a Christian and her experience as a woman. Only once does this attempt fail, and dualism reassert itself; on the question of women's ordination. This is the key issue, the one which comes up in connection with every aspect of Christian feminism. Nearly every page of this book illustrates its crucial nature and on nearly every page the case for women's ordination seems powerfully put. The book opens with eleven "scattered incidents from the last twenty years" which "are only some of the more visible signs that women

within Christianity... are not only demanding, but are actually achieving very radical changes in their status". Of these eleven incidents, six are concerned with the ordination of women. Yet on this point the author loses her nerve. Suddenly she confesses to her own "conservative ecoclergy" which does not allow her to believe in women's ordination. In a few pages she goes back on all the rest of her book.

The following chapter, however, on women in the bureaucracies, cannot be praised too highly. Sara Maitland opens up a critique that has not been attempted before, putting in a unified context such issues as how the Churches' funds are invested (and whether the Churches should have investments at all), whether the Church is an equal opportunities employer, why no trade union is recognized at Church House. It is in the next chapter, on language and spirituality, the author paints the happiest and most positive picture - of the joy and poetry and humour of women's spirituality, of the sisters' capacity to play and dance, to make pillars out of cup-ended pews and create art out of junk.

One might have hoped for a bibliography of Christian feminism, but the full notes to each chapter go quite a long way towards it. The book is pleasantly produced, austere in visual style. There are a few misprints, which seem to cluster around the passage on ordination.

# Monstrously energetic

Jennifer Uglow

NINA AUERBACH

Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth  
255pp. Harvard University Press.  
£12.25.  
0 674 95406 8

Nina Auerbach sets out to restore the now much defaced and tarnished Angel in the House to her original glory - indeed to endow her with a power and energy she never knew she had. Auerbach's thesis is that at the heart of Victorian imaginative life lay a form of "woman worship", that once the patriarchal god had vacated his throne, an "explosively mobile magic woman" slid into his place in a disguise such as we find in Leslie Stephen's epistolary prayer to Julia: "You see I have not got any saints and you must not be angry if I put you in the place where my saints used to be."

This heavy disguise is the reason why neither we nor the Victorians recognized that the woman they cherished was not a model of selflessness but a demon, a "monster of ego", a symbol of energy bursting out of the confines of the past and the fetters of the family. One of Auerbach's central tenets is that whether the popular stereotypes show women as conventional and pious wives, ridiculed old maids or outcast prostitutes, they are all images which embody the drive for change, the power to become their own opposite:

As angel, she is militant rather than nurturing, displacing the God she pretends to serve. As angelic demon, she becomes the source of all shaping and creative power, dropping the mask of humility as she forecasts apocalyptic new orders. As old maid, she simulates meekness while proclaiming that the world is all before her new dispensation. As fallen woman, she spurns meekness for the glory of her own apotheosis.

The book devotes a chapter to each of these "subversive paradigms" and to victims and queens as illustrative of powerlessness and power and argues that these examples moulded individual lives just as they did works of literature. The final chapter, not altogether without effort, allies these symbols of energy in womanhood to the pervasive idealization of fictional character itself, "a vehicle of mobile immortality that leaped free from the imperfections of its text and the eventual death of its author", becoming "the nineteenth century's most potent vision of humanity made perpetual".

Such large claims, delivered in a fluent and enthusiastic style, bolstered by evidence drawn from novels, painting and biography, set up strange currents of compulsion and repulsion. Reading such a book is like entering a fictional world, governed by its own self-referring rules, where familiar objects suffer a sea-change. The character most at home here, and appealed to constantly, is Lewis Carroll's Alice. It is relatively easy to see her as a type of fallen woman, "of simultaneous majesty and abasement". "Down, down, down", Alice's story begins, "would the fall never come to an end?" But the fall never really comes "so pivotal" to George Eliot's life, functioning "as the crucible in which unpromising beginnings were forged into unprecedented triumphs?" and is it really possible to see Emma Bovary as a "dark Madonna", a mere "parody of Hester Prynne"? The danger of this hermeneutic style of reading, where a hidden code reverses the surface text, is that one begins to lose sight of the explicit meaning altogether. Forms and genres become blurred, literature and life merge, novels and events become apolitical as each example of oppression is seen as a secret expression of power.

When Auerbach pursues her themes in detailed analyses of particular works, she can be very persuasive, as in the studies of *Tilbury*, *Dracula* and Freud's case study of "Dora", which demonstrate the way

these supposedly passive women metaphorically tower over their male manipulators, or the iconography of the fallen woman in the paintings of Egg, Watts and Rossetti in terms of despair but of rebellion, space and power. Close readings provide some provocative insights, for example the examination of the language of George Eliot's essays on male and female egoism, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists", "Worldliness and Other Worldliness" in terms of activity and passivity, or the discussion of the tableau in *Adam Bede*, where the pale corpse-like Dinah kisses flushed and sensual Hetty - "the kiss here hints at a more fundamental complicity between purity and fallenness than he (Adam) can understand, as in a subtle sense they drain each other's identities and exchange nature."

Woman and the Demon is most useful in its thoughtful re-interpretation of images of women in familiar works (*The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Villette*, *Henry James*). And it also draws attention to lesser-known writers, like the unjustly neglected journalist, Frances Power Cobbe, and to lesser works like Ellen Wood's *Mildred Arkell* (1865) or Anne Holdsworth's *Jessie's Trail*, *Spiral* (1894). But despite her implicit claim to survey Victorian popular culture as a whole, Auerbach leaves vast areas uncharted, for example comic writing and popular theatre, where melodrama and pantomime might have offered different forms of angelic heroines and powerful demons.

In the introduction she dismisses critics by acknowledging that his selection of examples is "representative, not exhaustive" so that "the collaborative reader is urged to cull his or her own demons, ladies, women, mermaids and so on, to enhance the paradigms each chapter constructs". Ideally the book and reader reads will emerge as a richer portrait than the book I wrote, I dutifully summoned, for example, Gustave Doré's 1867 illustrations to Tennyson's "Guinevere" with their rings of sensual, mermaid-like ladies, and prone guilty queen creeping across a vast expanse of floor at the feet of the upright king. Yet the exercise, although stimulating and enjoyable, also seemed to prove what a partial way of reading this is.

Perhaps because one has to cut a way through so much of the dense texture of Victorian literature to arrive at Auerbach's paradigm, her book has a curious insubstantiality, and many contextual questions remain unanswered. To what extent the angel/demon theme characterizes the Romantic as well as late Victorian writers? Is this myth of womanhood the only resonant image of the poet/outsider threatening the boundaries set by society? What of the works of Lewis and Carroll? Is such woman worship really a peculiarly English phenomenon, as the argument seems to suggest?

Woman and the Demon remains suggestive rather than authoritative. In her enthusiasm Auerbach sweeps over problems and seizes on hints from a wide range of writers (generously acknowledged) to develop her thesis - not only critics but also writers. Her argument is interesting in mythic pattern (Freud, Knechtsmacher, Welsh) but not feminist historians, critics, theorists (Victims, Showalter, Day). She reinterprets not only the Bible and lives of her chosen period but also clearly admires like Virginia Woolf and Hélène Cixous, so that they are made to celebrate with her "the eternal energy of character" and "perpetual metamorphosis" because "the idea of character has been part of woman's legacy as well as being part of the very fictionality blinding at once the clearly visible influence of the power of our unregarded past."

The result is a fascinating study which engages the reader continually in a search for meaning, sometimes in excited, sometimes in doubtful, sometimes in downright disagreement. However, much of the book may resist its large claims, there is no doubt that, like its predecessor, *Communities of Women*, Auerbach's new book makes us question our own assumptions about the relations between art and literature and belief.

PHILOSOPHY

# The consensus and beyond

John Skorupski

MARTIN HOLLIS and STEVEN LUKES (Editors)

*Consensus and Relativism*  
250pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £16.  
0 19 12773 9

The study of mentalities and cultures, conducted in rigorously naturalistic spirit, has always seemed to be relativism. Yet the connection is more complex than it appears. It can equally seem that relativism undermines the naturalistic perspective: placing the individual or social consciousness, relative to whose ego-constituting framework of concepts knowledge is possible, beyond the scope of causal explanation. Or is it that both connections hold - producing then a *reductio ad absurdum*?

Given the central place of naturalism in our culture, the issues are of major philosophical interest. Equally, the comparative study of systems of thought and their conditions, which give rise to these philosophical issues, is itself an absorbing and useful enterprise. The two interests are and should be connected. If we are to keep dogmatism and narrow-mindedness at bay, the philosopher should have a keen sense of the history and socially specific character of his own forms of thought, and the theorist, of their inherently ideological problematic cognitive status. Of course that is much easier to say than to practise. For various unavoidable reasons, it is hard indeed to keep both these very different kinds of inquiry simultaneously in view.

Given these difficulties, the essays in

this volume, though rather disparate in content, hang together well. They are unified partly by a usefully comprehensive introduction by Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, and partly by the contribution from Barry Barnes and David Bloor, of the Science Studies Unit at Edinburgh. Hollis and Bloor do not exist, the editors would have had to invent them. They put forward a Protagorean relativism - the cognitive community as the measure of all things - and claim that it follows from the fact that beliefs have social antecedents. In doing so, they advance a position which the other contributors are in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, united in opposing.

It is interesting to compare Barnes and Bloor's programme with that of an earlier Edinburgh practitioner of the naturalistic science of thought: David Hume. Their case against what they term "the rationalist" shares an important thesis with Hume's - the impossibility of a naturalistic conception of, genuinely *a priori* knowledge. There is however a striking difference. Hume's sceptical considerations produce with alarming cogency the conclusion that we never have reason to form a general belief on inductive grounds. The obvious difficulty for Hume is that he appears to leave himself no legitimate ground for asserting his own scientific generalizations about beliefs as products of association. Barnes and Bloor's position does not involve this kind of problem; but only because they inconspicuously extract relativist conclusions from sceptical arguments. Take for example their "equivalence postulate": that all beliefs, true or false, rational or irrational, have causal antecedents. Those of us who think a belief is well grounded only if caused

by its object through an appropriate and reliable process can agree. But Barnes and Bloor silently read more into the postulate: they imagine that the "sociology of knowledge" will reveal various kinds of biasing interest or socially induced distortion in the sociology of all (?) beliefs, effectively screening them from their objects. If we accepted that, we would have no reason to believe what we do, or less reason than we thought: not that we have perfectly good reason relative to the consensus of the community.

Once this Protagorean kind of relativism has been eliminated, the various issues begin to draw apart. Can we exclude the possibility of distinct but equally effective cognitive traditions, all of them capable of being progressively improved without ever converging? It is hard to see how we could - even if we imagine their effectiveness as being measured by standards of reasoning and norms of good explanation which we ourselves recognize, or whose force we could come to grasp. And if we reflect on the impossibility of excluding this, we are not led to reject certain classical conceptions of what it is for a sentence to have cognitive content? And encouraged to replace them by epistemic, or "anti-realist", conceptions which make relativism a coherent possibility?

It may indeed be so. The issues lead into an increasingly abstract philosophical examination of the implications of naturalism for epistemology and the philosophy of language. On the other hand, it does not follow from the merely epistemic possibility of optimal cognitive alternatives, that such alternative traditions in fact exist (or even that

they could be constructed). It is here that sober history and ethnography make a vital contribution. There is, in Hollis's phrase, a basic "epistemological unity of mankind". Certainly there is also a diversity of styles of reasoning. The fact worries Ian Hacking, in his essay, because it seems to imply that the systems of thought which issue from these diverse styles, and whose cognitive content, on an anti-realist view of content, is constituted by them, will be "incommensurable" (desperately slippery word). But this is an unreal worry, because diverse styles of reasoning are ultimately responsive to criticism in terms of certain fundamental propensities to classify and infer on which - in fact - human beings spontaneously agree. By those natural ground-level standards, the cognitive tradition of the modern West emerges without rivals in the degree and progressiveness of its explanatory adequacy and eventual technical success. These cooling draughts of basic common sense are administered in the essays by Ernest Gellner, Robin Horton and Charles Taylor.

Gellner has written with great insight on these questions elsewhere. In this volume, it is the essays by Taylor and Horton which contain the most stimulus for anyone with an interpretative interest in the evolution and differentiation of systems of thought. Taylor points out that there is more than one kind of cognitive interest: more than one ideal of what it is to understand the absolute nature of things and one's own place in that absolute order. There is - to speak in shorthand terms - a type of orientation to the world which issues in a "Galilean" style of rationality. There is another type of orientation, whose underlying ideal is what Taylor calls

"attunement", and Lévy-Bruhl, in a different context, called "mystical participation": the achievement of an unmediated apprehension of the underlying harmony, or unity-in-diversity, of things. As Taylor penetrantly says, the success of the Galilean style, internal as it is to its own criteria, nevertheless presents the other orientation with a challenge which it cannot ignore and cannot answer. Thus modernity disenchant the world.

The long paper by Robin Horton, "Tradition and Modernity Revisited", represents a new stage in an ambitious project: a project which stands in a great anthropological tradition and for which Horton's qualifications are in some ways unique. He restates and modifies, in fresh and interesting ways, themes which he has made familiar in previous essays. The fundamental contrast, as he now sees it, is between a "traditionalistic" conception of knowledge and "consensual" style of theorizing on the one hand, and a "progressivistic" conception of knowledge and "competitive" style of theorizing on the other. In fact (though he himself would disagree, for unconvincing reasons) Horton has moved closer to Weber's classic typology of legitimation. But he has yet, it seems to me, to face squarely the kind of issue raised in Taylor's paper: there can be a diversity of cognitive interests, as well as of modes of legitimation and styles of theorizing.

Taken together, Taylor's and Horton's papers suggest that we still need an unprejudiced re-examination of two past masters in this field - Lévy-Bruhl and Max Weber. They had no monopoly of wisdom, but they did grasp nettles which more recent studies have too easily avoided.

# Aspects of the absolute

Raymond Plant

MICHAEL ROSEN

*Logic, Dialectic and Its Criticism*  
250pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£12.95 (hardback).  
0 521 24944 6

JOHN SINGER

*The Philosophy of Logic*  
250pp. Oxford University Press.  
£12.95 (hardback, £1.75).  
0 19 26576 0

Michael Rosen has written an extremely good book on the central issue in Hegel's philosophy. In so recent commentators in English have written about the dialectic it has been by way of exposition of its general philosophy, together with attempts, for example in J. N. Rosen's work, to show that something in dialectic is at work in important arguments in modern philosophy (Wittgenstein on private language and Gödel's Theorem) and in a formal logical interpretation of the dialectic. Rosen's attitude is that the dialectic is not to be understood by modish attempts to domesticate the concept in contemporary and modern logic, and that since the dialectic is central to Hegel and that ultimately its claims are valid, Hegel's philosophical position is validated.

An interesting but, possibly, digressive chapter on how to go about interpreting a philosophical text, which clearly shows the influence of one of his German mentors, Rosen proceeds to the central problem in Hegel's philosophy: the method of dialectic. He claims in many places that the method can only be understood in its totality, comprehensive, absolute and unconditioned. He attempts to criticize an aspect of the method, but his criticism is therefore rendered inoperative by his own theory of the method. He also applies to criticizing the method anything that falls short of a philosophical standpoint. While the method of attaining truth is not, as it were, a particular kind of method, it is a method of a stage in the

system, nevertheless Rosen argues that if we accept Hegel's account we are not in a position to understand the method whereby truth is attained unless we are at the standpoint of truth.

In this way we have a paradox: to criticize Hegel we must claim that the system does not attain validly its point of completion. But to criticize from any other than the point of completion violates a crucial presupposition of the system itself, namely, that only someone who has attained the final point can perceive the rationality of its attainment.

As Rosen realizes, this is a problem with ramifications outside Hegel's philosophy. If a philosophical method, or basic philosophical assumptions, cannot be grounded in reason, because acceptance of them may well define for us what reason is, then a philosophical position becomes a self-supporting system and the decision for or against it is one which reason cannot help us to take. To be put in this position, however, is to reject implicitly the rational claims of philosophy, which are forced into the position of Nietzsche in *The Twilight of the Idols* - philosophical positions are not refuted (because they are irrefutable) but are to be overcome by acts of will. The search is for a method in philosophy which does not call itself into question, as Wittgenstein puts it.

The obvious solution as far as Hegel is concerned is to seek to detach the method of dialectic from the system which its operation realizes, so that the method can be discussed on its own terms irrespective of our view of the truth of the system. This approach is deeply un-Hegelian but may be the only way around the paradox which Rosen states and it is clearly the one which Marxist appropriators of the dialectic have to take. The major difficulty with the attempt is that there does not seem to be a very determinate method at work other than one general term as characterized in one general term as "immanent critique". However, this critique does not operate with a kind of regularity or procedure which could be distilled, learned and taught as a methodological device. The form it takes varies a good deal, with the subject-matter. Hegel was therefore probably right in his own estimation that method and substance are intertwined.

Even if we seek to reflect on the dialectic at the very general level of immanent critique, there are still grave difficulties. The operation of the dialectic on theories, modes of thought and activity is not to be seen just as a form of scepticism, for it produces a positive result: a transcendence of the negations of the old theory into a new, more synthetic truth. However, the assumption is that theories have common aspirations, that they are moving to similar goals and that one can be seen as a dialectical advance on the other in the light of the goal. But how are these goals to be grounded? If they are simply presuppositions, should they not be subjected to critique? If they can be rationally grounded they would have to be so before the process of dialectic could get under way, just because the rationality of dialectical progress would depend upon them. In addition, if we consider the idea that immanent critique reveals contradictions within theories then it is not clear that such a theory could yield positive results merely because a conjunction of contradictory propositions implies any proposition whatsoever.

Rosen then moves on to an issue which lies at the heart of his account of dialectic, an account which is as important as it is obscure. On a common view, and one which I have myself defended, the process of dialectic is that of developing and transforming our thoughts about something which at the level of the Understanding, is imperfect and abstract - a *Vorstellung* or representation. Dialectical philosophy treats the *Vorstellung* in such a way that it is transformed into a concept, and hence an imperfect understanding becomes a fully rational, cognitive one. This process of transformation would involve the immanent critique of the *Vorstellung* of a so that our thinking about it becomes situated in a more and more general theoretical structure which overcomes the dilemmas exposed in thinking about it in isolation. However, Rosen rejects this view in favour of what he calls the generative approach, in which our thinking about x is not transformed by working on an ordinary thought about it but by an autonomous cognition of x which we reach by a process of the "free evolution of thought". In *Science of Logic*, Rosen supports this

view with copious quotation from Hegel. However, I do not think he manages to give an account of what this process of autonomous generation consists in or how it could be rationally assessed. Of course, if Rosen is right, the problem is Hegel's and not his, and in fact because he cannot give a rational account of the procedure, he takes the dialectic to be absurd - "in my view the content-generating 'hyperintention' is sheer Neo-Platonic fantasy". Any rehabilitation of the dialectic would therefore depend upon a rehabilitation of some kind of speculative Neoplatonism in which thought could generate its own content out of itself independent of experience.

There is no doubt a good deal in *The Science of Logic* which supports Rosen's view but I doubt whether, for example, one could understand the actual role of the dialectic in *The Philosophy of Right* in this way. The transformative (and I believe defensible) conception of dialectic seems to be at work here. However, Rosen has written a brilliant, stimulating, not to say irritating book which should place the dialectic high on the agenda of Hegel scholars for years to come.

Hegel was once asked by the French philosopher Victor Cousin to give a precise account of his philosophy. Hegel responded acidly by saying, "Monsieur, ces choses ne se disent pas succinctement." Obviously any commentator who does not spread himself as expansively as Hegel's twenty-two volumes of philosophical writing has to come to terms with Hegel's own scathing estimation of summary and commentary. However, few critics have ever set themselves the daunting task of confronting Peter Singer in his *Fast Mapping* volume. How do you provide an account of Hegel in less than 100 pages? There seem to be two possible strategies. The first is to try to bring the reader to confront Hegel's basic philosophical doctrines in the sphere of logic, metaphysics and the science of knowledge and then to trace the ramifications of these basic doctrines in particular areas of his thought, for example in art, history, politics and the natural world. The other way is to take Hegel's work in one of these spheres and trace it back to the reader more gradually to confront the core of his system.

The difficulty with the first approach is that without a long account of Hegel's development it is very difficult to present his metaphysical doctrines in a clear and persuasive way. Singer adopts the second approach, and introduces us to Hegel's system by means of the *Philosophy of History*. There is no doubt that he produces a reasonably clear and plausible account of Hegel's philosophy, although he possibly makes an error in introducing metaphysical concepts only later in the essay. The notion of *Geist*, for example, is not reached until half-way through, and the dialectic not clearly confronted until page 75 (out of 86). I believe he could have introduced these concepts alongside some of the more empirical material on history. In *Fast Mapping*, I do not believe we are given a sufficient grasp of the systematic nature of Hegel's thought, or of why for Hegel systematic philosophy is an existential and cultural necessity. The failure to bring this out leads to something of an undervaluing of Hegel's achievement. We are invited to see Hegel as an important historical figure, particularly in the context of his influence on the Young Hegelians and Karl Marx, but the excitement of his philosophical vision is obscured.

Nevertheless there are many very good discussions in the book, some of which are masterpieces of compression and argument. The chapter on the relation between freedom and community is a model of its kind and one could not hope for clearer accounts of the materialist dialectic, or of Hegel's critique of Kant's moral theory.

Singer has written a valuable and useful introduction, but the reader is going to have to make efforts of his own if he is to get a proper impression from it of the scale of Hegel's achievement.

A new edition of Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*, translated with explanatory notes by Valentine Kretzschmar and Reese P. Miller, has just been published (353pp, Duckworth, £15.95, £9.27, £4.51). It uses the Latin text of 1644 as its primary source, while taking account of the changes and additions that appeared in the French translation by the Abbé Claude Picot in 1647.

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